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THE SECRET OF THE SWORD

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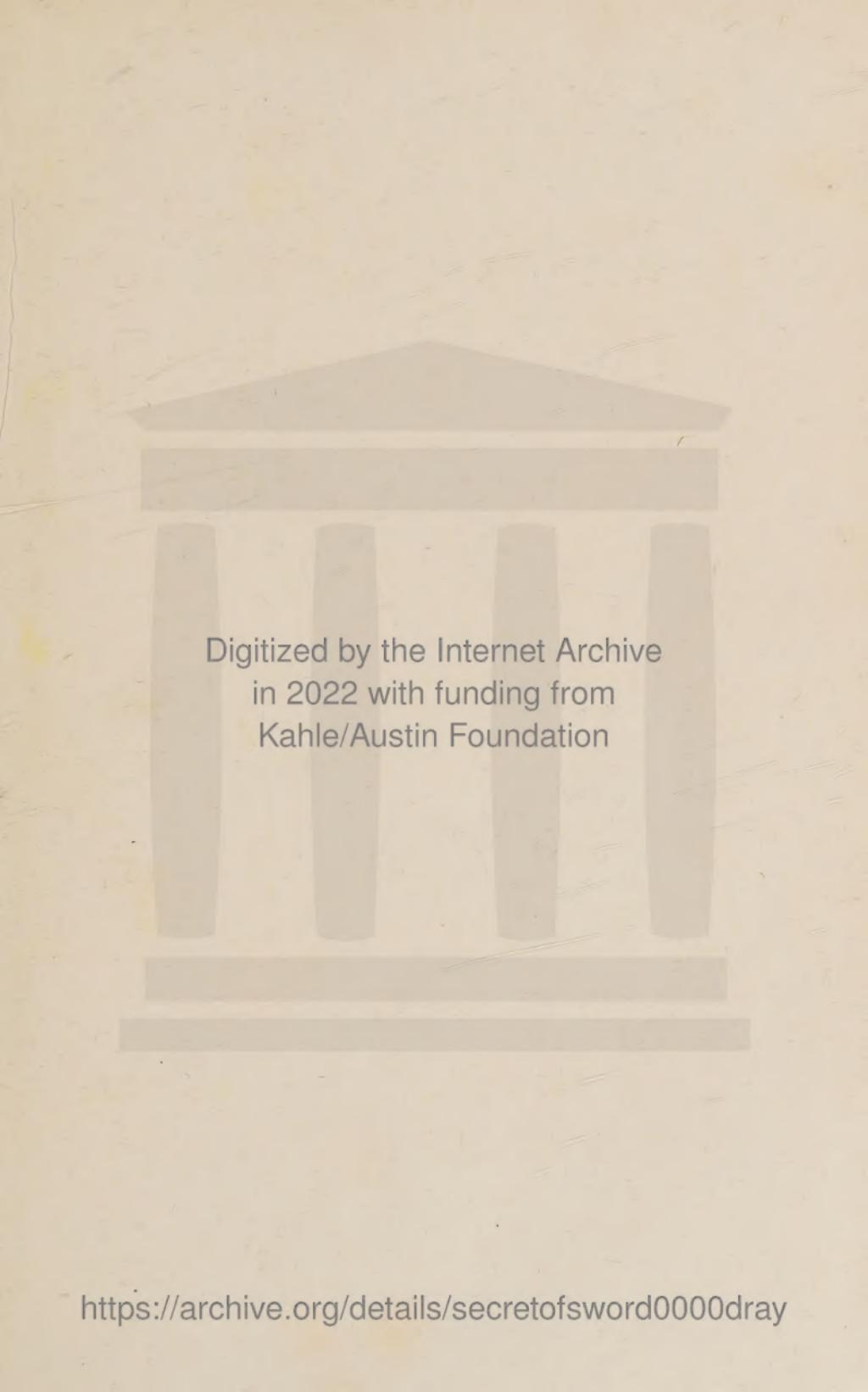
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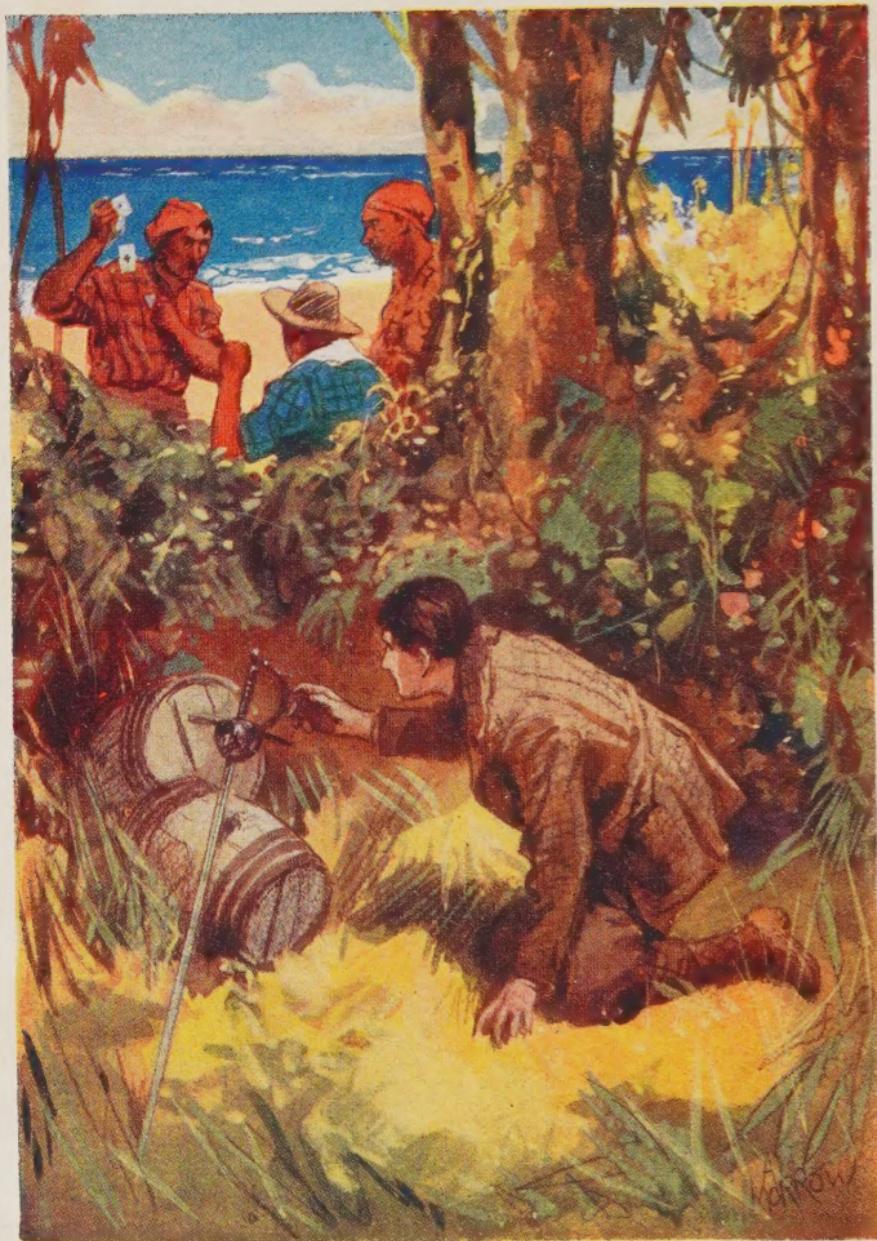
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"IT LAY AGAINST TWO WATER KEGS NEARER TO HAL THAN WERE THE
THREE PLAYERS"

THE SECRET OF THE SWORD

A TALE OF ADVENTURE



BY

DRAYCOT M. DELL

AUTHOR OF "DRAKE'S DRUM," "CARRION ISLAND," ETC.

JARROLD
PUBLISHERS (LONDON) LTD.

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY JARROLD AND SONS LTD. NORWICH

TO
VIOLET ANDERSON,
MY KINDLIEST CRITIC,
THIS LITTLE BOOK OF ADVENTURE
IS DEDICATED

DULWICH VILLAGE,
October, 1922.

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PROLOGUE

THE SENDING OF THE SWORD

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CHAPTER I

Marooned.

IT had been a week since she had fought her great fight and now, like some once-glorious champion lying silent in the lists, so she lay with the sand silted up against her tough oaken sides and the seaweed hanging its crêpe-like meshes over her tumbled spars.

Broken and battered though her poop-lantern was, it still stood jauntily to flaunt the soft wind that drifted idly across the island and her wounded side still presented a cool front to the sea that had receded from her just as a hunter draws back from a wounded and dying beast, still dangerous in its death throes.

What a ship she had been and how gallantly she had behaved. Seven days since she had found herself hemmed in by the mountainous waves that sought to overwhelm her.

They had broken upon and battered her, they had thrown the full battalions of their

might in wave after wave against her. They had stormed to the assault with their grim captain, the screeching Wind, to hound them on despite their many failures.

She had withstood the attack. Her strong bulwark had been English oak from English land, and how that oak had laughed at the stinging offensive of the sea.

Beaten and beaten again the rioting combers in their sombre storm hue had returned to the attack and they had remembered the lone figure who, all through the trying day and the more trying night, had stood by that ship's helm to fight her great fight with her.

He had known from whence she had come, and he had loved her for it.

Was she not one of the consorts of Sir Richard Grenville's "Revenge" ? and had she not stood off at Flores to wait an opportunity to rescue that gallant ship ?

Opportunity had not offered, but she had paid the penalty of her temerity by falling into the hands of the Don.

That had been many months ago, and little had the ship known that it was to be her destiny that again an English hand should guide her way.

Fate had led her in the way of John

Lambert, an Englishman sickened in the service of Spain, and Lambert, accompanied only by a few natives, had made good his escape in this tough craft, only to find himself beset by the worst storm he had ever experienced.

How his craft had lived puzzled him. Spray across her bows, tumbling mountains of waves breaking over her and running triumphantly across her decks.

Lash of spume in the scuppers and great cascades of white foam beating upon sail and poop to riot and revel in their devil's work and to test the baulks of this ship that had come from England.

Grey and angry skies had laughed at her puny efforts; rain and sleet had mingled in the general attack, and the dun clouds had stormed into the heavens to lend their batteries of wind to the service of the waves.

John Lambert, mariner of adventure, a servant of the great Drake at Rio de la Hatcha and St. John de Ulloa, had raised his old head to the heavens to see if there was no mercy there.

The wind had mocked and jeered at him. The rain had beaten upon his battered steel

cuirass as if in condemnation of his past service in the ranks of his country's foes.

Lambert's great jaws had been set tight. His old and lined face had shown no sign of fear, for he alone knew that Spain had compelled, and God knew that he had never raised his hand against his own kind, and that in Spain's service he had been merciful to the poor and stricken natives upon whom the grandees battened.

Glory of swords used in a great cause had been Lambert's lot, and the Don had known him from Aurigny's Isle as far as the Isthmus of Darien. It had been something of a jest to keep Lambert, their captive, alive ; they had watched his sufferings and had joyed in them. It had been better than the torture of the Inquisition to see how he grew old in captivity.

They had showered mock honours upon him. Their golden fleeces, and scriptural decorations which so sadly belied the method of their attainment. Simple John Lambert had borne these mockeries just as he had comported himself in the fight—with dignity and an understanding of their real nature.

The manner of the man had compelled respect at last, and the baiting ceased and,

in an extremity, they had found his sword useful enough to save their precious lives. Lambert had eaten their salt and had served them for it, but the iron had entered into his heart and, when some friendly natives offered him the opportunity, he had taken it and had shaken the dust of Spain from the Cordova leather boots that Spain had given him—and, at the first opportunity, he had flung those boots into the sea.

All through the long day John Lambert had stood by his ship whilst a band of fearful Peruvian natives crouched below to mate with terror.

Lambert had laughed into the sweeping seas and had raised his white head to the crowding skies. It would be good to die thus, if he had to die, here in this last great fight with the sea he had served and loved—the mother who had lulled him to rest in his youth and whom he had served with stalwart loyalty under the flag of Hawkins and Drake.

Night had come with no gay banners to token a cessation of the violent storm, and all through the night he had remained at his post gazing out over the tumbling waters.

He had lashed himself to the helm and,

in his simple heart, the last prayers of a man who had followed the dictates of his Maker still remained to leave him unafraid.

Perhaps his mind had travelled back to the little streets below Mount Edgcombe, perhaps he thought of old mariner friends nigh to the Barbican, the son who still followed the sea in coastwise trade from Plymouth up to the little Scots ports.

And in the night the wind had risen in intensity and the seas had leaped to their command to lift the ship upon their shoulders and jostle and shake her, rattle and break her, twist and bend her, careen and up-end her.

She, poor tortured thing, had fought gamely and in the end had triumphed for, tired of the fight, the waves had cast her on this shore and now, with the silted sand about her, the sun beat down upon her white decks and she saw that her enemy had withdrawn —defeated.

But the fight had been too much. She would never ride buoyantly over the bosom of the ocean again, for her life's blood had drained out from that great rent in her side and the sand's clutching fingers had drawn her deep into their gold prison from whence she would never escape.

And John Lambert was alone.

Those who had gone aboard with him were no more—the disease-infested swamps of this island had seen to that. They had gone in search of food and had returned with ague-stricken limbs.

Lambert had done his best for them but it had not sufficed, and now they lay amid the sand as the ship lay and Lambert faced the end with that same fortitude with which he had suffered the gifts of Spain.

As he stood there, looking out over the calm seas with behind him the green palms stirring slightly in the soft breeze, a smile came to his lips.

It was hard to have to die on such a lovely island and so far away from home.

There, though, they would remember him. He knew that a man's deeds lived after him and there were enough of those to his credit.

He was satisfied in that no longer Spain controlled him. There would be no sinister-faced Spaniard to commit him to the deep.

Six days ago he had fashioned a boat.

Hope had been uppermost and, despite his seventy-five years, he had not faced the prospect of that dangerous voyage with fear ; for fear and Lambert were not friends.

The boat was finished. It lay safe from the clutch of the sea, but he knew that he would never use it, for already the old sailor's cheeks were tinted with an unnatural colour, and he knew that soon he would be with those who had died for England when the great Armadas had come against her and had found their fate in the Channel and off Flamborough Head.

John Lambert gave one last glance at the ship and then, walking rather unsteadily, he made his way to a small hut that he and the natives had constructed from some of the ship's baulks.

It seemed strange that in this haven of beauty there should be so much loneliness, and that other things had crept in to finish the work of the sea.

Little sand coves bit into the small island and there were flowers growing in profusion amongst the palms and the bread-fruit trees.

Gaily coloured birds flitted amid the branches of the trees, and their sweet songs came to Lambert's ears on the lip of the wind.

He paused and looked about him and then, bowing his head, entered the hut.

Seating himself on a barrel he drew a box towards him and, with tired hands, spread out a piece of parchment and began to write.

As he wrote he smiled to himself, the smile of the happy warrior.

After a few minutes he looked up.

“One day they will keep this for England,” he whispered. “One day they will find it and use my names and remember John Lambert.”

He paused.

“I will call that headland Shell Point,” he said to himself. “Then there is Gull Lagoon: the gulls always come there and always will come there. Then there is Shark Sound, and that dull red-coloured cape shall be called Cape Maroon.”

He bent to his work. John Lambert was drawing a rough map and it was a map of the island. Every particular feature of the little place he gave a name to and, when he had finished, he began to write a letter. His hand was shaking but he managed to finish the missive.

The old mariner folded the map and the missive up and then picked up his sword.

It was a great weapon with an inscription

engraved on the blade, and this is how the inscription ran :

To fortune will this rapier lead
If you prove a man indeed.

John Lambert held the blade lovingly,
and then, tired out, he lay down in the sand.
On the morrow he would complete his work.

CHAPTER II

The Last Jest of Don Ramon de Gonsalez.

THE dawn of a new day found John Lambert kneeling in the sand and, with downbent eyes, praying before his sword which he had plunged in the sand in front of him.

Near at hand, drawn safely up from the clutch of the sea, was a roughly constructed boat.

For some time Lambert knelt there, but at last he rose to his feet, and, drawing out his great sword, he laid it tenderly in the little wooden boat.

“ You may go to a foreign hand,” he said, “ but I have asked my Maker that one day you may be used again in the service of England. Good-bye, my blade, good-bye.”

He bent his head and, for one moment his lips touched the spot where the guard formed the cross before which he had worshipped, and, with this last farewell made, he drew the boat into the sea and, setting her head

for the open ocean, he pushed the boat into the current that was to draw it seaward.

“Good-bye, trusty blade, good-bye,” he said softly, and then he turned and looked wistfully about him.

There was a greyness about his lips and his cheeks seemed sunken since the night before—sadly sunken. He removed his cuirass and, seated on the sand, looked at the immensity of sky and ocean, and there was no bitterness in his heart. There was only thankfulness for the life that had gone, only belief in the life that was to come.

The noon sun found him there; the first stars shone down upon that white old head; and the night—merciful in its mission—came down to lay its sable shroud upon the casket that had once contained the soul of John Lambert.

For John Lambert was dead. He lay gazing at the heavens with sightless eyes, but death had found him with a smile of triumph lying on those firm, closed lips.

Just the soft lap of the waves had sounded his passing, and the fitful breeze that had tried to fill the sails of the “*Donna Catarina*,” at that moment beating up for the island, sighed for the old mariner.

Beneath the stars like some dream-ship in all the glory of her white sails and gilded rails came the "Donna Catarina."

A proud galleon the "Donna Catarina." Her poop-lantern was constructed of solid silver and crystal and her perfectly kept decks glistened beneath the peeping points of light in the sky.

Somewhere on her deck an olive-skinned sailor was singing to the accompaniment of a guitar, and below Don Ramon de Gonsalez was drinking the wines of Spain with his officers.

So the "Donna Catarina" came slowly towards that little island which she was destined to find with the dawn, and by the oaken board, upon which rich viands and fresh fruits lay, Don Ramon de Gonsalez eyed his officers with a bilious eye.

"From Lambert's lips we shall learn the method of his escape," he said significantly. "He's led us a pretty chase and only Providence can guide us to him in these seas so full of islets."

Don Ramon paused.

"If Lambert will not speak there shall be no mercy shown this time. Through someone's lack of vigilance he was allowed to

escape, and the person who was responsible for that fact shall suffer heavily at our hands."

The Don spread out an expressive hand.

"A dangerous man on one of his country's ships," he said. "Why, I, who was privileged to fight at Flores, saw one such ship hold up our whole fleet. Small and fragile, short-handed, with sickness aboard, she fought us to the end and would have sunk amidst us had Sir Richard Grenville had his way, but Grenville died and many died with him."

The Don shrugged his shoulders.

"Grenville died well, and the damage done to our fleet was enormous. Lambert could do as much damage had he the luck to find such a crew as fought for Grenville off Flores. He must not find such a crew, and no pains must be spared to hunt him down, and no pains spared to find who allowed him to elude the guards and cut out the ship."

A flush mounted to the cheek of more than one hidalgo at that board.

Well did they know that on that night of carouse, when John Lambert had made good his escape, that they, among many others, had been in their cups.

The young Marquis Redina de Perdita

looked at his comrade, Gaspard san Salvator, and the two exchanged meaning glances. They knew more of Lambert's escape than either cared to admit, for they had been in charge of the guard over the captured English ship and it had been their prodigal generosity that had allowed the guard to become fuddled in their cups.

Through the night the "*Donna Catarina*" ploughed her way and, with the first light of a new day, the slender spit of land that had caught Lambert's ship in its grip, came to view through the coloury dawn.

"Land ahead!"

The news sped through the galleon to give added speed to Don Ramon's careful toilet, and, by the time he came on deck, the "*Donna Catarina*" was already anchored and rocking on the tide not many cable lengths from a wreck that rose in pathetic disdain from amid the sand.

Don Ramon eyed the derelict with an interested but not excited eye for he had never been known to show great excitement, even in the baiting of his prisoners, for his was a cool and a callous manner.

Now, as he eyed the wreck, the familiarity of her twisted lantern and the scars of Flores

that lay unhealed upon her sides, convinced him that Fate had thrown John Lambert into his hands once more.

He ordered a boat to be lowered and in this he took himself ashore and, as he stood and examined what once had been his prize, a sarcastic smile came into his eyes and about his lips.

This ship was powerless to accomplish now what once Grenville's "Revenge" had accomplished.

Attended by Redina de Perdita and Gaspard san Salvator, the Don strode along the sandy beach of that little island set amid the bluest of seas, and so came upon the still form of John Lambert.

"So," he said softly.

He bent over the body and looked into the cold set face.

"Too late," he whispered. "It is unfortunate Marquis," he added to one of his companions. "We could have learnt much from these lips, but perhaps it is well for some of those who are near to me that these lips are silent."

Don Ramon de Gonsalez raised an immaculately manicured hand to his pointed

black beard and, as he smoothed the beard, he glanced down at the dead.

"We played many jests with the man," he said slowly. "Do you mind the night when we bestowed the decoration of the Fleece upon him, *san Salvator*."

The young grandee smiled.

"Aye," he answered, "and although he tried to conceal the hatred in which he held us it escaped from his eyes."

Don Ramon chuckled.

"It was better than the Inquisition," he said, "for the humbling of a man's pride in his country hurts more than physical pain. Here was a man who laughed at physical pain, a man who loved his country just as he hated Spain."

The Spaniard looked about him.

"I do not see that great sword of his," he added. "He and his sword were inseparables, but perchance he lost it in the storm that stove the ship upon the sands."

"And the last jest . . . ?" suggested the Marquis, settling the lace at his wrists.

"We will bear him back with us," came the answer. "In all his Spanish orders he shall be decorated and in our uniform for he would have hated that. A cuirass of good

Toledo steel shall enclose his breast, and the red plume of Castile shall deck his helm, and we will have published abroad that Don John Lambert, an Englishman who served Spain, fought and died beneath our banner. It would be a goodly jest."

"But the dead . . . ?" questioned the Marquis, his face more pale than usual.

"Is he not an heretic?" asked Don Ramon by way of reply. "It is the last jest and it shall be played. Go Marquis and have the preparations made, for I have made my mind up."

The Marquis Redina de Perdita stumbled back over the sand dunes, with the sand powdering his boots of costly leather.

And as he walked he cursed Don Ramon's jest, for the Marquis Redina de Perdita was of a superstitious turn of mind, and to him there was danger in jesting with the dead.

Nevertheless he gave the necessary instructions, and, that night, when the "Donna Catarina" raised sail, she bore away from the island the last earthly remains of John Lambert, mariner of fortune, and the bane of Spain. And above his bones the Dons held carouse.

Through soft and deep seas the ship made

her way, with a nice breeze to bear her onward, and a stately ship she seemed as she rode along like a queen—a Queen of Spain.

The great cross on her mainsail stood out to the heavens to tell of the holy mission of Spain, and the green seas came up to caress her sides. But little did those Spanish timbers know of the brooding fire that lay within that now calm ocean ; of the growling menace that lay in the quickly cresting wave-caps that from a mere ripple had raised their heads until now the sea was furrowed like a newly ploughed field.

And whilst Don Ramon de Gonsalez feasted and wined below the wind increased to a cup full, and the sails filled out and the ship stepped forward like the stately lady she was.

But only a lady.

Her feet were not shod for the rough steps of the storm ; her brocaded gown was not the wear for the tempest so much as the ball-room, and now, as the rising waves caught her, she rocked and, in a fit of annoyance, pitched amid the tumble of waters.

The heavens were clouding over. Generous stars, once bestowers of light through the night, had now been dimmed by the cloaking

mantle of the gathering clouds, and finally the whole heavens was obscured by the black bank of evil winged heralds of the gale.

Don Ramon, in his cups, and dicing with the young Marquis, cursed as the dice rolled from the oaken table, and he sent Gaspard san Salvator up above to caution the helmsman.

And Gaspard, seeing the angry sky and the rising sea, crossed himself and came below to tell his captain of the approaching storm.

Don Ramon took no notice. Part of the Marquis's princely estate near Seville had just been lost in one throw. What cared he for the sea that was a medium for the conquest of land rather than a thing to be conquered and won?

" Dice on ! " he cried.

They diced.

Above the helmsman eyed the waves with a none too happy eye and below the body of John Lambert moved to the rhythm of the sea he had fought and beaten—the sea he had loved.

" Would ye sport with a man ? " whispered the waves to the " Donna Catarina. " " Would ye tempt us so far by jesting with one we know as we do not know ye. "

"Peace, give me peace," groaned the baulks of Spain, as they withstood the shock of the waters, and prayed that the batteries of the waves would be silenced in due course.

But the seas rose. The ploughed field became peaks of mountains over which the "Donna Catarina," poor harassed lady, had to clamber and slip into the green valleys below.

One great wave she took side on so that, had it not been for the dexterous work of the helmsman, she would have careened and disappeared.

There was no John Lambert to guard this ship. Her captain was a soldier and he remained below, leaving the charge of the ship to a more common hand than his.

The wind rose and the rain lashed down, and the waves stormed upon the "Donna Catarina" just as they had stormed upon John Lambert's ship.

They fought and rocked her, raised and tossed her, lifted and dropped her. Flung her one moment into a great hollow amid the waters, and then tossed her to the peak of a wave as though they were joking with her.

She was not of the oak of England. True,

she was beautiful, and, when launched at Cadiz, had been admired by all eyes, especially the eyes of Donna Inez, the wife of Don Ramon.

“ You shall render to us the body of John Lambert,” cried the wind.

But the ship held on.

Don Ramon was sprawled across the table. The Marquis was asleep. Gaspard san Salvator was dozing over his glass of wine, and the crew, terrified at the storm, were praying for help.

And the box that held John Lambert waited to be given to the sea.

No morning dawned for the sky was overcast and the waves were mountains high.

The green combers lashed down upon the ship and swept over her.

One booming wave had come in-board and had carried the mainmast away. Some of the crew were praying below, whilst above the wind was playing the devil with the rigging of the “ *Donna Catarina*. ”

The waves broke and battered her down, and they charged upon her, but she met the assault like some stricken thing, knowing that if such an attack came again she could not survive it.

Her helm had no helmsman, for he had been swept away, and now, uncontrolled, she sought to fight the storm, but she failed.

She drifted side on to the waves, and for one moment she appeared on the crest of a comber, the next moment she had gone from view, carrying Don Ramon and all his Dons down with her—down to their grave in the sea that John Lambert had served.

There floated free from the wreckage a black box in which lay an English mariner and, far distant and in calmer waters a little boat, bearing a sword, raced towards its destiny.

Don Ramon de Gonsalez's last jest had proved as abortive as all the others, for the sea that loved John Lambert had claimed him for her own and, fathoms down, he slept as his comrades who lay in the deep seas from Aurigny's Isle to Flamborough Head—slept in honour, and waiting for the last trumpet that would call them to action again.

The Secret of the Sword

CHAPTER I

HAL'S LEGACY

HAL and Dick Irving were brothers, but never were two boys so unlike. Hal, although only a year and a half older than Dick, looked a veritable giant compared with the younger Irving.

Hal was tall and strong and dark, whilst Dick was thinner, inclined also to be short, and wore glasses. On the day when these two come for the first time before your notice, an important ceremony was to take place at Rolleston Hall, their old Cornish home.

The Hall was a very ancient building lying near the bay at Padstow, and said once to be the resort of a band of smugglers. The tunnels running down to one of the Cornish coves remain to this day, and many were the glorious afternoons Hal and Dick

had had playing at running goods past the imaginary Customs House officers.

But to-day there was no thought of play in either of the boys' minds, for their guardian and lawyer, Mr. Alfred Creed, was to read the will that their father, Skipper Irving, owner of the Yellow Anchor Line, had left at his death but a few weeks before.

Many were the memories that the two had of the grand, kind-hearted, and breezy old sea captain who had been their father, and whose yacht, the "Albatross," they could see now tossing gently to and fro as the tide rose and the seas came into Padstow Inlet past Trevose Head to warn the waiting shipping that high-tide was approaching.

"I suppose we shall be going back to school soon," said Hal regretfully, as he turned from the window and came to where Dick was sitting at the table.

"Yes, won't you be glad," replied Dick, who loved books and learning, and was the idol of his masters.

Hal laughed.

"You know I won't Dick," he said. "What a difference St. Austin's after the sea here and the fishing trips with the bos'n."

At that very moment the door opened,

and there entered the room a short and muscular-looking old sailor, whose eyes were bright and twinkled like stars, and whose walk suggested that he was far less at home on land than sea.

“What ho! me hearties,” he cried jovially. “So here we are, and you, Hal, just aching to get out on the ‘Saucy Sally’ to do a bit of fishing.” He caught hold of Hal’s hand and stretched his other out to Dick.

“Boys,” he said, “I was Skipper Irving’s best friend, what you call chum, and I came to-day to tell you what I have had in my mind these last few weeks. I want to be your chum, too, and when you, Hal, and you, Dick, have finished your schooldays we will have our adventures together. Now what do you say?”

Hal gripped Bos’n Bill’s hand, and so did Dick.

“The sea, bos’n—we can go to sea, then?” he exclaimed. “Wouldn’t that be fine, Dick?”

“Steady on, steady on!” cried the bos’n. “My arm’s not the mainbrace nor the tow-rope. Why, Hal, you’ll pull it off in a minute!”

Then they all commenced to discuss plans

for the future, and it was a perfect babble of laughter and talk that the sudden entry of Mr. Alfred Creed put a stop to.

The boys' guardian smiled genially at the bos'n, and then quietly told Hal and Dick to take their places at the table. As they did so he looked curiously at Hal, and then rang a handbell. The door opened, and Perkins, an old servant of the Rolleston family, entered. He was carrying some long object covered in green baize.

Mr. Creed took it and laid it down carefully on the table, whilst Hal and Dick eyed it with evident curiosity—a meaning glance passed between the guardian and the bos'n—and then slowly Mr. Creed took a document from a blue envelope.

He rose and looked first at Hal and then at Dick.

"I want you to listen very carefully, boys, whilst I read your father's will," he began, and then, adjusting his spectacles, he looked down at the paper.

"To my son, Hal, I leave a legacy of strength. I want him to begin as I began with the world before him to conquer, unaided, and to help him in this I bequeath

to him my Spanish sword. If he uses my legacy rightly he will not go unrewarded. To my younger son, Richard, I leave the partnership in the Yellow Anchor Line, our home, and all it contains, together with such lands and ships as are enumerated herein."

In quiet tones Mr. Creed read out a long list of boats and other possessions.

Despite the sudden blow that had been dealt Hal in the knowledge that all his father's wealth had been left to Dick, he was quick to stretch out his hand to his brother.

"And you deserve it Dick," he said, and would have spoken again had not Mr. Creed's voice interrupted him.

"Your sword, Hal," Mr. Creed said quietly and handed over to Hal a long glittering weapon made of Spanish steel. A light of joy came into Hal's eyes as he held the sword in his hand, and for a moment he forgot how different a legacy this was from the one Dick had received.

Bos'n Bill leaned forward and laid his hand on Hal's shoulder.

"Boy," he murmured, "that sword was everything to your father, and no one but

himself was ever allowed to touch it. I have seen him knock a nigger cook clean over when he touched it on one trip we made."

Hal looked at the hilt. It was beautifully carved, and on it was a strange motto in Latin, which Dick translated as :

To fortune will this rapier lead,
If you prove a man indeed.

Hal's eyes shone, and he gripped the bos'n's hand as he held the sword.

" My father left me the best thing of all," he said. " He meant that I should make a fight to get on, and I *will* make a fight."

" Well spoken, Hal," said Mr. Creed. " And now then, bos'n, it's time we had a chat, so come with me to the study. We'll leave the boys together for a bit."

He drew the bos'n out of the room.

As the last echoes of their retreating footsteps came to Dick's ears he drew near to Hal.

" Look here, Hal," he said, " it seems rather strange—this will. I get money, and you only get that sword. Let's share and share alike ; it will be much more fair, and

somehow I couldn't think of keeping everything myself."

"I know how you feel, Dick," said Hal, "but that will was dad's last message to us, and it has to be obeyed. Dear dad knew best. Yes, father loved me as you well know, and he had an object in only leaving me his sword."

Whilst the two boys were chatting it was getting dark, and Hal was just about to suggest that they went out in search of the bos'n and their guardian, when a strange thing happened.

There was a step on the gravel, and the next moment the handle of the French windows, that like glass doors opened "out on the garden," was tried.

Then came a tap on the glass, and Hal, thinking that perhaps Bos'n Bill was outside, turned to open them, but suddenly his hand fell away from the handle, for pressed close to the window was a bronzed face, and Hal could see a man's two eyes. One was of glass, but the other was no imitation, for it gleamed as it gazed intently at the sword that Hal still held.

The next moment the man had gone!

The following day was wonderfully bright

and sunny, and so were Hal and Dick, for their guardian had just told them that, as it was so near the end of the term, he had written to their head-master saying he wished to keep them on until after the holidays.

“ Won’t we have fun, Dick ? ” said Hal, as he flashed his father’s sword in the sunlight. “ This is going to be a real holiday after all.” He broke off and ran, followed by Dick, down towards the harbour, for Bos’n Bill was coming towards the Hall, and he was singing as he came :

Heave ho—heave ho ! we’re sailing out for Rio,
The seas are high, it’s a windy sky,
But don your oilskins, pipe your eye,
We’re rolling off to Rio.

“ Hallo, boys,” he cried, stopping his song and smiling as they ran towards him. “ What’s the news ? ”

“ We’re staying on until after the holidays,” said Hal happily. “ What a time we’ll have, bos’n.”

“ Splice me mainbrace,” came the retort, “ and you haven’t thanked me yet for arranging it for you.”

"You!" exclaimed both Hal and Dick at once.

"Of course," replied the bos'n. "Didn't I say we were chums? Well, I got on the right side of your guardian, and here you are."

Suddenly there came the ear-splitting note of a ship's siren, and Bos'n Bill turned and looked down into the harbour where lay a new arrival—a tramp steamer.

"That was a nasty noise, bos'n," said Hal, laughing at the look on Bill's face.

"Yes," came the mysterious reply, "and a nasty ship, with a nasty captain. I've met him in many seas all over the world, lad, and so had your father. He is my enemy, and he was your father's enemy, was 'One-eye' Garcia, owner of the 'Black Heather'."

"Is he very bronzed, and has he really only one eye?" said Hal quickly.

"Aye, he has," replied the bluff old bos'n. "The other is a glass 'un, and it is because of that he is called 'One-eye' Garcia."

In quick undertones Hal told their friend of the tapping on the window and the face against the glass.

"That was Garcia right enough," said the

bos'n when Hal had finished. "And he meant no good in coming up to the Hall at night." He paused. "Hal," he went on suddenly, "it was the sword Garcia came for —the sword. I heard him tell Captain Irving that he would have that sword even if it took fifty years to get it. If you take my advice you won't bring it out too often after this. Garcia means to keep his word."

"And I mean to keep the sword," said Hal laughing, and then, as the bos'n moved off towards the Hall, Hal cried to Dick, "Let's go home from the coves, Dick. What do you say to a morning in the tunnels?"

Bos'n Bill could not restrain his laughter as the two raced away, but suddenly a grave look came over his face, and he shook his head.

"We'll have to watch Garcia," he said to himself. "We shall all have to watch Garcia."

Then he slowly mounted the hill to talk the matter over with Mr. Creed, whilst happy Hal and Dick were walking along the sands in the direction of the rocks.

The tide was coming in as they made their way along the sands, but they did not hurry.

"It would be a dangerous thing for any-

one who did not know the coast to come along here now, wouldn't it, Hal?" said Dick. "For see, already we are cut off from the harbour."

Hal laughed.

"This is where the disappearing trick comes in," he said. "We disappear into the cliff side." With that he ran along the beach and disappeared into a cave, followed by Dick.

From the cave a tunnel branched out and, a short way along it, was a time-worn door that for many years now had been fixed into the rock by a staple.

"Have you your pocket-torch, Dick?" said Hal, as he went ahead. "It's jolly dark here."

Dick drew his torch from his pocket and shone it ahead of them—it fell on something that sent a look of surprise into the faces of the two.

The door barred their way!

Hal ran forward and put his shoulder against the obstruction, but it would not move.

And behind them the sea was licking the edge of the cave.

"What on earth shall we do?" said Dick

nervously. "We cannot go back now. We are cut off by the tide."

For answer Hal laid his sword against the side of the tunnel and took off his coat.

"We must go forward, Dick," he said, "and I'm going to cut my way through the door. Those panels are worn by time, and we should not have very much difficulty."

Hal picked up his sword and clasped it firmly by the hilt. The next moment he lunged and the fine steel penetrated the wood.

"Why, the door is as soft as anything," said Hal as he lunged and lunged again. But really, although he was speaking like this, he was losing hope, for the sea was coming nearer and nearer, and Hal felt he would never make a hole large enough in time.

Striking and re-striking he slashed and cut at the door. Already he had shifted a panel, and putting his shoulder against this he broke it and then commenced with the sword again.

The water was up to his feet now, and slowly and steadily it rose and rose. Hal had almost given up hope when, in a lunge

of desperation, his sword pierced a rotten piece of board and a large panel fell to the floor of the tunnel.

“Hurry through, Dick,” cried Hal, and no sooner had his brother got to the other side than a strange thing happened. Slowly the hilt of Hal’s sword turned. Hal could feel it move beneath his hand.

“Dick,” he cried, rushing through the opening, “Dick, your light, quick ! ”

In a moment Dick was at Hal’s side.

“Shine your light on the sword-hilt,” cried Hal, and as Dick did so his brother gave a gasp of astonishment. In the hilt of the sword a cavity had appeared, and in the cavity was a faded piece of yellow parchment.

“What a discovery, Dick ! ” cried Hal as his trembling fingers drew out the sea-stained parchment. Slowly he spread it out, and with eager eyes the boys examined it.

“It’s a letter and a map,” said Hal, and then very slowly he read :

“I am an English adventurer who has found service with the Spaniards ; but in horror at their cruelty and their desire for

conquest, I sought to escape them, and, helped by some friendly natives who were journeying to conceal the treasure of the 'Incas,' have done so. Our boat has been wrecked here, and we are starving on this island called by me the Isle of Shells, and I know that I shall not live. Already all the natives are dead. I therefore am sending this sword afloat in a frail boat, and it is to the arm that strikes strongly and truly that my secret will be revealed. All the treasure of the 'Incas' is here, and as I write this I am the only man who knows of its existence and where it is concealed. I enclose map. I do not know exact spot. Good fortune then to the strongest.

"Adieu,

"JOHN LAMBERT

"(Mariner of Fortune)"

Hal and Dick gasped.

"Treasure!" said Hal excitedly. "So father knew that this sword was the finest legacy he could give me. What a find, Dick—what a find!"

Even Dick—the studious Dick—was roused now—his eyes were bright with interest.

"Look at the map," said Hal. "He has written a kind of riddle in verse on it."

Nor-nor-east or nor-nor-west,
Dig and delve, nor take ye rest.
South of Shell Point and Gull Lagoon,
North of Shark Sound and Cape Maroon,
Lies at the depth of a fair-sized man
A cave of gold which no eyes can scan.
For chambers of jewels and silver lie
Awaiting the hand and the hope that's high.
Take ye a shype and steer ye aright,
So ye find Shell Isle—and its treasure bright.

When Hal had finished reading out the strange rhyme he looked at Dick, and then transferred his attention to the map.

"See, Dick," he exclaimed, "the map is a rough one, and evidently John Lambert named all the parts of the island himself. See what strange inlets and bays are there." His face flushed with excitement. "Wouldn't it be splendid to search for the island?" he said, "if we can only get Mr. Creed to give us permission!"

Into Hal's mind had come visions of a wonderful islet with sandy beaches and luxuriant palm trees, whilst from the sailor's indications he could see that points of interest abounded.

50 THE SECRET OF THE SWORD

"There must be something interesting there," said Hal, as he placed his finger on an inlet marked "Mystery Inlet."

Slowly Hal folded the parchment up and carefully put it in an inner pocket. Then he picked up the sword.

"Dick," he said, "we are going to find that treasure!"

Hal was just turning back the covering over the hilt of the sword when suddenly a sound came to their ears.

The sound of a man's feet—and they were coming their way!

CHAPTER II

THE FIGHT IN THE TUNNEL

Search with the sword, and ye shall find
Dame Fortune's favour all the way,
For richer gold than e'er was mined
Lies in the heart that fears no fray.
Keep straight and strong the whole world through,
It will bring fame and love to you.

—Old Sea Ballad.

“PUT out the light, Dick, quick !” As Hal uttered the words the sound of feet came nearer—and then stopped. It seemed to Dick and Hal, standing there in the darkened cavern, that they could almost hear the breathing of that other person who was obviously not far from them, and it was rather nervously that Dick came closer to his brother.

“Who on earth can it be ?” he whispered. “I thought no one knew of the tunnel's existence save guardian and the bos'n.”

Hal's hand tightened over the old rapier, and as he felt the cold steel beneath his hand a certain feeling of safety came to him.

"Father left me a fine legacy," he murmured. "Don't be afraid, Dicky; we always have the sword."

As if the stranger in the darkness had heard the remark, a soft laugh came out of the blackness, and then the scraping of a boot upon the rock side of the passage—it was the noise that Hal had heard often, the sound of a "clopping" sea-boot.

Hal stood in front of his brother, the sword held ready.

"Who goes there?" he cried.

Dick's hand had slipped into his, and he knew that Dick was very afraid, so he braced himself to be stronger than he had ever been before.

Hal leaned forward, and then gave a step back, for through the darkness he had seen something at last—and that something was an eye—a cold, glittering eye that seemed to be poised in the blackness.

Like a flash it came to him.

"*One-eye*" Garcia!

He knew now that his father's enemy faced him in the tunnel, but what that enemy could want with him it was difficult to understand.

Hal remembered Bos'n Bill's warning, but

the next second all thought of that vanished, for he heard now the sound of those sea-boots, and the next minute a big, lurching figure rushed forward at the two boys.

Hal backed against the rocks and pushed Dick behind him, and there in the darkness his sword flashed out. It became like some living thing beneath the boy's hand, as it darted here and there in search of the silent foe.

But now the foe was silent no longer, for suddenly a cry came through the blackness, and Hal heard Garcia step away.

"I've touched him, Dick," he whispered. "Perhaps he will go."

But "go" was a word Garcia did not understand, and now he kept silent no longer.

"Give me the sword, young Irving," he said, "and you shall leave here unharmed, otherwise I won't answer for any bruises that you may get."

Hal did not reply, but sought in the darkness to slip by his adversary; but Garcia was before him, so Hal withdrew. Then suddenly an idea came to him and, leaning towards Dicky, he caught at his brother's arm.

"Dick," he whispered, so that Garcia could not hear, "when next he comes near, and I attack him, slip past me and go for help. Run as fast as you can up to the Hall; perhaps you will find the bos'n there."

For answer Dick gripped his brother's hand and then let go, for Garcia had rushed forward, and in the scramble that followed Dick became separated from Hal.

"Run, Dick!" cried Hal as he lunged out, and Dick did run. Hal could hear the echoes of his footsteps down the cavern, and he laughed into Garcia's face, a face that he could see now.

The man was angry, for his voice betrayed him as he scuffled with Hal and tried to force him to hand over the sword, but Hal remained firm, and at last slipped from Garcia's clutches and stood with his back to the tunnel.

"If you come any nearer," he cried, "it will not be my fault if you are hurt."

He swung the sword round and round until it formed an arc of steel and when it touched the rock a spark flashed ominously from it.

Garcia saw that Hal was determined, and moved away, but not for long, for Hal in flourishing the sword had touched the rock

too hard, and like a flash the sword fell from his grasp to the ground.

Before Hal could recover it, Garcia had dashed towards the fallen object, and in a moment had picked it up, and was hurrying through the blackness of the cavern with it in his hand.

A cry escaped Hal's lips, and in a moment he was following in pursuit. Through all the bends and dips in the tunnel the chase was continued. Although Hal knew that Garcia was getting away easily, he did not give up. Rather did he redouble his efforts to overtake his enemy, but it was no use, and when, in the distance of the tunnel, he heard Garcia's footsteps on the stone steps that led to the cellars of Rolleston Hall, his heart sank.

He followed up the steps and ran through the cellars crying out at the top of his voice, but it was too late for just as he emerged into the hall he could see the figure of "One-eye" Garcia rushing down the path that led over the cliffs towards the sea.

Just as he was turning away a cry came from the Hall, and Hal saw Dick and the bos'n hurrying towards him.

"It's too late," he said, running to meet

them. "It was Garcia, bos'n, 'One-eye' Garcia, and he is at the sea by now."

All three hastened to the cliff side, and Bos'n Bill's face paled as he pointed out to sea.

"Look!" said the bos'n; "do you see that motor-boat out there?"

Hal caught at the old sailor's arm.

"It's Garcia," he said slowly. "And see, bos'n, he is waving something."

"It's the sword," said Dick slowly. "Father's sword."

Hal's face was set and his hands were clenched.

"Garcia will not always have that sword," he said. "Not if my name's Hal Irving."

The old bos'n turned away and looked down to where old Skipper Irving's yacht lay. To him it seemed that as Hal spoke he had heard the great sailor's voice.

Hal looked up and laughed. "I wonder what Garcia will say," he said, "when he discovers the opening in the hilt and finds that there is nothing there after all?"

The other three, sitting at the old oaken table in the dining-room of Rolleston Hall, looked towards Hal. Dick laughed, but both Mr. Creed and the bos'n looked grave.

"Garcia guesses at the existence of a paper now, and means to get that paper, Hal," said their guardian quietly, "and it rests with us to protect it."

"Yes," added the bos'n, "I've known Garcia these many years and in many seas, and he somehow always manages to get what he wants."

It was but a few short hours after Hal had lost the old Spanish rapier, and already he had told of the strange happening in the tunnel, when the hilt of the sword had turned and he and Dick had found the paper.

At this moment the piece of time-worn parchment was spread out on the table before them, and Mr. Creed was carefully examining it.

"We must forget about Garcia," he said, "and go into Hal's 'find.' There is something underlying this paper, and I believe that the treasure that the adventurer speaks of must still be there."

"The only recollection that I have of any great Spanish treasure or, for that matter, pirate treasure being found is the raising of the old galleon, the 'Santa Maria,' that was wrecked at the mouth of the Amazon, and the unearthing of Timothy Too's 'spoils' of

many a merchantman. This last treasure was found on one of those coral islets somewhere off the coast of Australia—I forget where for the moment."

Bos'n Bill smoothed out the paper. "The first owner of the sword calls the place 'The Isle of Shells,'" he said, "but I know of no island or islet of that name, and I've sailed in all the seas."

"I wonder how father came by the sword," put in Hal. "Do you know, bos'n?"

The bos'n smiled.

"I was with him when he found it, and so was Garcia," he said, softly. "I remember now we had landed for water, somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. The skipper had gone off in one direction and Garcia and I in another when your father hailed us. Digging in the sand he had unearthed the wreckage of a frail boat, and it was amongst the wreckage that we found the sword. Of course, Skipper Irving claimed it but I remember at the time that Garcia said it was partly his. Your father firmly declined to give up what he had found, and he had it cleaned, and I believe that it was something that he once heard whilst ashore at Rio de Janeiro that made him set a high value on

his discovery. A fortune-teller told him that one day he would lead the way to treasure with a sword. Foolishly he told Garcia and it set Garcia thinking, for Garcia is of Spanish blood and very superstitious."

Bos'n Bill laughed.

"Why many's the time the skipper has told me that he knew there was a mystery attached to the blade," he added. "Little did he know how right he was."

Dick looked carefully at the parchment.

"So the adventurer's boat—the Englishman's boat—never reached anyone who could help," he said quietly.

Hal picked the map up and looked keenly at it. "No, the boat never arrived," he said, slowly, "but the sword came into an Englishman's hand again." He looked up quickly. "And it is a Spaniard, or rather a man of Spanish blood, who is trying to find the treasure. It seems almost as though we are fighting for that poor adventurer who was lost on the island."

"Aye, that is so," said the bos'n, "and fight we will boys." He turned to Mr. Creed. "What are your views on the matter, sir?" he exclaimed.

A slight smile came over Mr. Creed's face,

and he looked into the flushed cheeks of the boys.

"I hardly know what to think," he said, "but I know what Hal and Dick are thinking. They want to be off in search of this gold and these jewels ; they want to find the Isle of Shells."

"I should say we do," said both the boys in unison.

"Well, well," said Mr. Creed, "boys will be boys, I suppose ; but there will be grave risks to be run and perhaps dangers that might terrify older men even than myself—and then, bos'n, there is Garcia."

"Yes," mused the bos'n, "there is always Garcia, and always will be Garcia, you mark my words."

"To my mind," said Mr. Creed, "it would be better to wait until you are very much older, Hal. We all recognize that whatever is found is yours, for the sword was your legacy, and whatever the sword contains was included in that. But I, as your guardian, can see the difficulties, and I am wondering if those difficulties are too great for you."

A look of disappointment came to Hal's face, but in a moment it had gone.

"Guardian," he said quickly, "I would not, of course, go against your word or try to find the treasure by myself, but"—and Hal's jaw was firm—"to me it seems that in giving me this sword my father intended me to fight a way through life alone, and he meant me to do it now. The search for this and the adventure will serve the purpose my father intended."

"Well spoken, Hal," said the bos'n, and laying a hand on Hal's shoulder he turned to Mr. Creed.

"I was his father's friend," he said quietly, "and I am inclined to think that Hal is right. The skipper wanted the lad to be a man, and as far as I can see this is man's work."

For a moment Mr. Creed did not speak, but at last he turned to Hal.

"Do you know, Hal, I think you and the bos'n are right," he said, "and somehow the finding of this map has put a new feeling into me. We will organize an expedition to search the seas for the isle. We will go together"—he turned to Dick—"that is, Dick," he said, "if you will place your yacht and money at our disposal."

Dick laughed.

"Why, it seems unnecessary," he said.
"Hal knows that whatever I have is half his."

Hal held out his hand and took Dick's.

"You are a brick, Dicky," was all he said.

Hal and the bos'n began a rollicking sea chantey, much to Mr. Creed's amusement, but at last peace was restored, and the four began to make their plans.

Unknown to them a face was peering in at the long French windows, and on the face was a look of anger.

Away out to sea came three blasts from a siren, and at the last blast the figure near the windows rose and was soon lost in the shadows of the cliff path.

When the man—for man it was—reached the foot of the steep path, he took from his pocket an electric torch, the glass at the end of which was red, and, lifting this in his right hand, he switched on the light and waved it to and fro.

As if in answer to his signal another blast came from the siren, and the blast was followed by the sound a boat makes as it splashes from the "falls" into the water.

The man peering out over the sea saw a boat rowing quickly towards him.

When it touched the sands he sprang in and soon the sea mist and the approaching night hid it from view of land.

Morgan—Garcia's first lieutenant—had gone back to report, and it was startling news he carried for his master's ears.

Three days had passed since the dramatic fight in the Rolleston Tunnels, and during those three days the Hall had been an absolute hive of industry.

Bos'n Bill had been very much in evidence, and during moments of relaxation, when some rest had to be taken from the tedious work of packing stores, clothes, etc., the old salt had enlivened the time by telling Hal and Dick some of the most wonderful tales of the sea.

There had been wrecks that the bos'n had figured in, and a fight with Chinese pirates at the mouth of the Pearl River, an occasion when he had rescued Skipper Irving from death. The bos'n's tales were also of wonderful fish and strange places at which he had called and when at last the three days of preparation were over the minds of both Hal and Dick were tuned to the adventures that lay before them.

When the last case had been packed and

all the coverings had been set tidily over the furniture of the Hall, when the two boys had paid their last visit to the tunnels and the old familiar haunts of the Hall, the little party left Rolleston behind them and, helped by numerous sailors from Padstow, their baggage and the boys' pets were taken to the boat.

Mr. Creed had said that the "Albatross" would be an ideal ship for the voyage, and as Dick had consented to its use, the "Albatross" had been selected for the trip in search of the treasure.

At present she was being loaded with all the food and water that the party would need, and round about the harbour sides the scene was one of great activity.

As Hal came near the ship the music of the cranes was music indeed, and his eyes lit up as he saw how neatly the ship had been decorated. A new coat of white paint had been given to her under the bos'n's direction, and she looked like a wonderful white bird on a placid lake, as her white sides towered out of the calm blue of the sea.

"So the day of departure has come at last, Hal," said Mr. Creed, noticing the flush of pleasure on the boy's face. "And there lies

the ship that is to take us either to great wealth or to a disappointment."

"Shiver me timbers," said the bos'n, who had come up to them. "There's going to be no disappointment this trip—the 'Albatross' is bound for fortune." He slapped his hand on Hal's shoulder. "And unless I am very much mistaken we are going to win back your sword too."

Then the old sailor broke off and commenced to sing a ditty of the sea that spoke of a good ship weathering the storm, and so catching was the refrain that the sailors working aboard the yacht took it up.

Yo, heave ho—and a heave again,
We sail to-day for the Spanish Main ;
And many a goodly ship of Spain
Shall give in return its ill-got gain.
So heave, yo heave, swing the capstan round,
We weigh to-day, and we're outward bound.

Their voices rang out in cheery unison, and even Mr. Creed caught the infection.

"Why, bos'n," he exclaimed, "I feel almost as excited as Hal here!"

"Excited!" said the bos'n. "Why, I feel like I did on my first trip. Wait, though, until we get out into the rolling sea, with the

water like a mass of emeralds and a clear sky and a fresh breeze. Why, Creed, it's life—the life!" Then he hurried off to give a hand to a group of sailors who were in difficulties with a rather large case.

As for Mr. Creed, he hurried aboard, followed by Hal and Dick; but their guardian, leaving the boys to watch the work going on above board, went below to his cabin, for Mr. Creed had business to do, and he always saw to that first.

Below in the cabin two men were waiting: the one a negro of slight build, and the other a big, dark-looking man, with a heavy moustache and a proper sea lurch.

Mr. Creed beckoned the negro outside, and after questioning him a little told him to go ashore as his services would not be wanted. When the man had disappeared, Mr. Creed returned to the cabin and, seating himself before the deal table that was in the centre of the place, he looked keenly at the man with the thick black hair.

"So you want to come aboard as cook for the trip?" he said abruptly.

"Aye, aye, sir," murmured the man, and then—"I've been cook aboard many craft," he continued, "from hooker to liner, from

tramp to oil-tank steamer, so I think I could do the work on this packet."

Mr. Creed smiled. To him this nautical jargon was a dead language.

From a sailor's shirt pocket the man next drew a bundle of papers, and these he handed over to Hal's guardian.

"That's me record," he said, "an' I think you will find it a good one. I'm Michaels, I am—Michaels of Grimsby—and me family has always been for the sea. Me father—"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Creed, as he looked at the documents, and by so doing stopped the man's flow of talk.

At last he looked up.

"Well, Michaels," he said, "I think that you will do for the post. Your record seems a good one. We sail to-day, you know. Perhaps there are one or two little things you want to do before we leave the harbour?" He drew out his watch. "You can have an hour's leave on land if you like," he said; "but only an hour, mind, as we shall go with the tide."

Touching his forelock, the man hurried from the cabin, and, leaping nimbly over the various boxes that covered the deck, he clambered like a monkey down a rope on the

yacht's side and swung by another towards the harbour.

Bos'n Bill looked up.

"There's a sailor for you, Hal," he cried. "When you can do that you needn't tell people that you've sailed before the mast—they'll know it."

It was then that Mr. Creed appeared.

"I've just engaged that man, bos'n," he said. "He's coming as cook."

A surprised look settled over old Bill's face, and he looked blankly into Mr. Creed's eyes.

"Well, I'm shivered!" he said. "That fellow is the first cook I've ever known to show such signs of being a perfect sailor. Rummy," he said, softly. "Very rummy. He's worthy of a better job—better money. Very rummy."

Hal laughed at the bos'n's astonishment, but Hal would not have laughed had he seen the new cook a few minutes later. For "Michaels" was deep in conversation with another man—and that man was "One-eye" Garcia—and Garcia was calling the new cook Morgan.

* * * * *

They were outward bound at last. Hawser and chain had been cast away. All neatly curled were the ropes now, and the still wet anchor lay heavily on the white deck. Above and below board everything had been made "snug," and the beat of the engines was the only sound that broke the stillness.

For a time Hal and Dick, standing in the stern and watching the old familiar Cornish coast fade slowly away, did not speak. The thought that they were off at last was too wonderful to believe, and it was only when there came to the ears the sound of feet and the jolly voice of the bos'n that they awoke from their day-dreaming.

"So we're off, boys!" he cried, commencing to dance a hornpipe. "We're sailing for the sea of sunshine towards the bay of hopes, and if we don't end up at the Isle of Treasure my name is not Anthony Thomas William Hawkins."

"Doesn't she just leap through the water," said Hal enthusiastically, as he watched the graceful little ship skim along.

"It's better than school, eh, Dick?" he said, turning to his brother, and for the first time in his life Dick confessed that here was something better than lessons.

"Well, we are off for our adventures," said the bos'n. "And I think we are in for them, Hal. You trust Garcia to follow, and there's going to be as pretty a chase as ever I have heard of for the treasure of the sword."

Away in the cook's galley the song of Michaels came to an abrupt ending, and a curious look settled over the new cook's face, but in a moment he was busy again in the galley and singing as though nothing had interfered with his sea chantey.

Suddenly Hal ran away from the group that had now gathered in the stern of the "Albatross," and on the port side of the vessel he pointed out to sea, calling to Dick and the bos'n.

"Look there, bos'n!" he cried. "A lot of young whales."

Old Bill laughed and drew Dick over to Hal's side.

"They're not whales, lad," he said laughingly; "that is a school of porpoises, and aren't they just having a game."

As they watched, the black, satiny sides of the lumbering porpoises turned over and over, and one would occasionally give a leap upwards and fall back into the sea.

For quite a time they watched these

strange animals until the coming darkness hid the "sea-hogs" from view.

A gong rang out.

"There she blows," said the bos'n, "and I wager that you two are just ready for your first meal aboard the good ship 'Albatross.' Come along, me lubbers, cookie's calling."

All three hurried below, and soon a merry little party was seated around the table in the big cabin, and Hal and Dick were eating with appetites that had been sharpened by the sea air.

It was quite dark when they went on deck again, but the sky was clear of clouds, and there was a crescent moon in the sky.

For some time Hal and Dick and the bos'n had a great game of guessing at the stars until, tiring of that, the bos'n suggested a game of draughts. So he and Hal went below to indulge in the sailor's favourite game, leaving Dick to saunter about the deck and gaze contentedly at the sea.

Dick had wandered aft, and the stern part of the ship was entirely deserted as a figure emerged from the cook's galley. It was Michaels—and in his hand he held something that looked very much like a pocket electric lamp.

In a perfectly unconcerned manner he leant against the side of the ship, and it seemed that he was just idling away the minutes before turning into his hammock for the night. But that was by no means Michaels's intention, for his keen black eyes were looking out to sea as though he was waiting for something to appear, and a look of impatience came over his face as the minutes crept into half-hours, and as yet no sign of anything came to him from across the waters.

But at last a faint exclamation slipped from his lips and, leaning over the ship's side, he looked out to westward, for faintly, very faintly, a light appeared on the horizon, and it was not a steady light—it moved to and fro as though someone were swinging a lantern at a great distance. But gradually the brightness and size of the light increased, and at last Michaels gave a sigh of relief.

Once or twice he looked about him as if to see whether he was unobserved, and then carefully raising his hand he switched the light on and slowly moved his arm backwards and forwards in the shape of an arc.

The light in the distance was now steadied, but a moment later, as though in answer to Michaels's signal, it flashed to and fro. At

first it was quick, but it slowed down, and then by fits and starts it became quick or slow. The light was "talking," and the means by which it was "talking" was the use of the Morse code.

Now laying his torch on the ship's rail, Michaels began to switch it on and off in very much the same manner as the light in the distance was manipulated, and then with a few sudden flashes he stopped, and, hastily putting his torch in his pocket, turned about.

A figure was coming down the deck—the figure of Mr. Creed.

"Ah, Michaels," he said good humouredly, "and how do you like the work?"

"Very much, sir," said the cook, touching his cap. "Very different to feeding the crew of a whaler in the Southern Seas."

Mr. Creed smiled.

"Do you know, Michaels," he said softly, "I should have thought that a man of your size and seamanship would have chosen some better profession at sea than that of a cook."

Michaels flushed.

"I was never much good at anything else than cooking," he said abruptly; and then, with a hastily made excuse that there was

work to be done, he hurried away and went below.

"That was a lie," said Mr. Creed quietly to himself, "but what reason would he have for lying?"

Then there flashed into Mr. Creed's mind a name—*and the name was Garcia!*

Could it mean, wondered Mr. Creed, that "One-eye" Garcia had sent a spy aboard the 'Albatross,' or that Michaels was just a seaman with a bad record who wished to hide himself?

CHAPTER III

A MYSTERY OF THE SEA

THAT first night outward-bound Hal and Dick slept like tops, and it was only the morning sunshine stealing through the open porthole, and the cry of the bos'n outside their cabin door, that awoke them.

"Get a fair wind on," he cried. "It's high time you lubbers were up on deck. In my day they would have sent you into the shrouds for this. Avast there, now hurry along, or you'll miss one of the finest sights you ever saw in your life."

As they jumped out of their bunks and commenced to dress they could hear old Bill stumping up the companion-way and, later, Mr. Creed's laugh as he stood on deck chatting to the old sailor.

"There's the 'Collingwood,' sir, and the 'Queen Elizabeth.' Shiver me timbers, but it's a fine sight!"

Then it was that the two boys realized that something out of the ordinary was

happening, and they put added vigour into their dressing, and soon their two heads appeared above the hatchway.

"So there you are," said the bos'n, catching hold of them and hurrying them to the yacht's side. "Look what you nearly missed."

Hal and Dick gasped in unison, for there, stretching away as far as the eye could reach, was a fleet—a fleet whose mastheads were gay with fluttering signals.

"It's the British Fleet, boys," said Mr. Creed, who had come abreast of them. "They are going out, so the bos'n says, for battle practice."

What a sight that line of ships presented ! Fussy little torpedo-boats were hurrying along on the flanks of the giant dreadnaughts, and then came a number of sleek, high-pooped battle cruisers, the sun reflecting on their grey sides.

Behind came a dashing light cruiser squadron and a couple of refitting ships. The line seemed never ending to the two boys, who heaved a sigh of regret when the smoke from the last of the craft was but a speck on the horizon.

"What a sight !" said Hal ; and he looked

enthusiastically at the bos'n; but old Bill had turned away; that fleet had aroused memories of many a gallant sailor—many a friend whose last fight had been fought off the Horn reef.

Dick and Hal found it poor fun that day to play draughts on the deck, so they drew old Bill into the bow of the ship and, with the bos'n seated on an empty barrel, they sprawled on the deck whilst he told them stories of his experiences at sea.

And so another day passed, and another, until the trim yacht was beating her way steadily towards her goal—the port of Rio de Janeiro, lying on the east coast of South America.

To the boys the days were full of never-ending delight, and their nights periods of perfect rest, for, tired out with their fun aboard, no sooner had they turned in than they slept.

By day they played deck quoits, and sometimes cricket, in which game the bos'n joined with great gusto.

"Bos'n," Hal was accustomed to say, "your under-arms stump me every time."

"When I was a boy," began the bos'n, but he was always interrupted by Dick,

who declared that Bill had never been anything else but a boy.

One evening Hal and Dick had stayed up longer than usual, and they were leaning over the taffrail watching the lights from the port-holes reflected in the water, when suddenly a sound came faintly from the distance.

"Dick," said Hal quietly, "a cry! Did you hear a cry?"

Dick, who had been lost in thought, looked up. "I didn't hear anything, Hal," he replied. "You wouldn't hear a cry though here—there doesn't seem another ship anywhere on the sea."

But then, as if from a great distance, came a penetrating cry like a long-drawn-out "H-e-l-p!"

"There, Dick," said Hal. "That was a cry right enough. Go quickly and fetch the bos'n. I can't understand it."

When his brother had gone he peered out to sea. His look was keen, but he could discern nothing on the surface of the water.

There came the sound of hurrying steps, and the next moment Bos'n Bill appeared.

"Have you seen the sea-serpent, Hal?"

he said jokingly. "Dick here declares that you heard a voice on the sea. You're dreaming, laddie."

But the old salt's smile turned to a look of keenness a moment later, for again had come that cry, and now it seemed very much nearer. Captain Sefton, an old friend of the bos'n, who was "skippering" the yacht for the trip, was on the bridge, and Bill hailed him.

"Slow her, cap'n," he called, making a megaphone of his hands. "Something in distress on the starboard beam."

A bell rang—the "thump, thump" of the pistons became slower, and finally the noise ceased altogether; the white ship came to a standstill in a sea as smooth as glass.

The darkness had deepened, and it was almost impossible to see anything at a distance with the human eye, but the bos'n had brought his glass.

He put it up to his eyes and swept his gaze over the sea. At last he gave an exclamation and, handing his glass to Hal, turned his steps towards the bridge, crying to the captain to pipe the boat's crew on deck.

From amidships came a stertorian cry, carried along by many lusty throats, and as

Hal hurried towards where the boats were swinging in the davits he knew what it was the bos'n had seen. Out to sea was a small raft, and on that raft was a figure!

"That's right," cried the bos'n, as the men hurried at unhitching the ropes. "Put your backs into it, lads. Now then, Hal," he said, "jump in, lad."

Nothing loth, Hal climbed into the boat, and soon he was followed by the crew, and with them shared the strange feeling of seeing the sea come up to meet him.

The bos'n was at the tiller, and as the boat touched the water and was rowed rapidly away from the yacht, it was old Bill's hand that guided the boat to where the tiny raft lay—they could see it now, but a speck in the distance.

"Bend to it," encouraged the bos'n, and the sailors put all the power they knew into their work, so that at last she shot alongside the hastily made raft—they could see how hastily it had been made—and Hal, leaning forward, gave a gasp of astonishment.

"Bos'n," he cried excitedly, "it's a girl—and she's alone on the raft."

And sure enough Hal's words were correct, for lying back, her fair hair touching the

waves every time the raft dipped, was a girl, and she was unconscious.

As the boat drew alongside the raft the rough hands of the sailors tenderly lifted the girl into their craft, and when Hal, with his pocket torch, had seen that nothing was left on the raft, the boat was quickly pulled away.

“Poor lassie,” said the bos’n, as he took off his coat and slipped it about the girl. “She’s starved and hungry. Row, me hearties!” he cried to the sailors. “The sooner we get her in a bunk the better.”

As for Hal, although, of course, he felt sorry for this waif of the sea, he could not get away from the fact that here was an adventure of the first order. What a story to tell the boys when he got back to old Cornwall!

“Is she very ill, bos’n?” he said anxiously, leaning forward and looking to where the girl lay on the bos’n’s coat. The old sailor looked down at the girl, and then, raising his head, shook it.

“You can never tell, Hal,” he said, and then, “Here we are! Steady, lads, steady! That’s it. Got the rope?—good!” In a minute the boat had been hauled to the ladder that led down the side of the yacht and,

lifting the girl in his arms, the bos'n hurried on deck, leaving Hal to find Dick and tell him the wonderful adventure.

“Dick,” he exclaimed, as the two waited on the deck whilst Mr. Creed, who knew something of doctoring, hurried below to where the girl had been laid, “I wonder who she is, and how she got on the raft.”

“It must have been a wreck, Hal,” said Dick wisely.

They would have gone on discussing the matter until midnight had not the bos'n arrived on the scene.

“Wreck, indeed!” he exclaimed. “You two will look like wrecks soon if you don’t go to bed right away. Yes, our castaway is going on splendidly, and we shall all know more in the morning, so turn in now, both of you—else——” He laughed, and laid his hand significantly on the buckle of his belt.

Hal and Dick fled.

The two boys were almost too excited to sleep that night, but at last they slipped off into slumber with their minds full of wrecks and floating rafts, and they awoke to hear the sounds of sailors’ voices on deck. Like a streak of light Hal was out of bed and waking Dick, and in no time the two were

on deck witnessing a strange sight. Out to sea was what appeared to be a little water-spout that shot up cascades of water at regular intervals.

"Why, it's a whale, Dick!" said Hal, and a whale it was, as the bos'n explained.

"It's the first time for many a year that I have seen one in these seas," he said, "but they are known to get out of their own climate occasionally. There she blows," he cried, as again a column of water shot into the air. For some little time the two watched the large, lumbering animal, but at last, tiring of this, they drew the bos'n aside.

"The castaway," said Hal. "What is the news, bos'n?"

"Mr. Creed has seen her this morning, and she is as good as well."

They had come to the upturned barrel now, and it was when the bos'n had taken his usual place on the top of it that he turned again to the boys.

"Boys," he said, "she was a little orphan, whose people lived in Madeira. They died in an epidemic, and it was the kindly Portuguese who were sending her back to England on a banana boat. Apparently the ship fired in mid sea, and when the native crew

realized that disaster was aboard they deserted to the boats and left the captain and this child unprotected."

"The cowards!" said Dick indignantly.

"Aye, and that they were," replied the bos'n. "But the captain must have been a brave chap. He built that raft, but when she got afloat he found it too light for the two, so he put Nan on it, and the last she saw of him he was clinging to a plank. Let's hope he was picked up by some passing boat, for he was a brave man."

"So her name is Nan?" said Hal at last.
"Nan what, bos'n?"

"Nan Nothing," said old Bill. "It's a strange name."

Talking thus the three wandered down to where Michaels—the dark-browed Michaels—was preparing breakfast, and they had just begun when the sound of light footfalls came to their ears, and the next minute a now rosy-faced girl of about fifteen stood framed in the cabin entrance.

The bos'n rose and drew her forward.

"Nan," he said, "this is Hal and this is Dick, so you won't be lonely on the yacht."

He led her to a seat, and soon she was

telling the boys of her adventure on the burning ship.

When she had finished, Mr. Creed leaned forward.

"Now, Nan," he said, "it will be quite easy for us to get into the path of the home-going liners and to 'speak' to one of them. They would then take you aboard and on to England."

Nan looked a trifle downcast, and so did Hal and Dick.

"Or," continued Mr. Creed, "you can join our little party, which is on a treasure hunt to the South Atlantic. Now what do you say?"

Nan's face flushed with pleasure, and she turned enthusiastically to Mr. Creed.

"Why, that would be lovely!" she said. "I have always wanted to take part in an adventure—not the kind of one on the ship I have left, though," she added, with a heavy sigh.

After breakfast it was finally decided upon that Nan should stay on the yacht, as it was known to Mr. Creed that she really had no one to go to in England save a very poor relative of her mother, whose family was already too large to be properly cared for.

Nan had told these facts simply to Mr. Creed before she met the boys, and it had decided the kindly guardian in his determination to take this waif of the sea under his wing.

That day Hal and Dick and Nan got up to some high jinks on the boat. The newcomer turned out to be not only full of fun, but quite a leader in any game that was arranged, and she was so frank and such a loyal playmate that at the close of the first day both Hal and Dick voted her a friend worth having.

All this time the yacht was beating towards Rio, and as yet only the calmest of weather had been experienced. The sea both day and night was as calm as a mill-pond, but Captain Sefton's knowledge of these waters had taught him not to trust too much in such happy omens.

These days there was a strange smile to be seen on the face of Mr. Creed whenever he came near the cook's galley, but it was a smile that Michaels hardly ever saw, for when Mr. Creed approached he would be busily engaged in some duty or other.

Mr. Creed was watching—watching carefully—and whenever Michaels happened to

be on deck when night approached it was always Mr. Creed who, from the shadow of a boat or some coiled rope, would watch the man's figure intently; and Mr. Creed knew well enough that his work would not be wasted, for it had not taken him long to realize that somewhere behind them, on the very course they were taking, a lean, fast, black craft was following—following—and, what was more, *Michaels knew that she was following!*

Whilst Hal, Dick, and the bos'n spent their days either in story-telling or in deck games, Mr. Creed, on the other hand, always managed to have something to do when they wanted him to be with them.

"It's not fair, guardian, you surely haven't all that much work to do," said Hal one day when, for the seventieth time, Mr. Creed had reluctantly refused to play cricket.

"Yes, Hal, I have," replied his guardian, and with a smile he sauntered off down the deck. Just as he came abreast of the galley a man who had been coming up the cook's ladder paused and, as if thinking better of it, returned.

Mr. Creed laughed softly to himself and went off towards the chart-room. The chart-room was amidships, and it was here that

apparently Mr. Creed spent most of his time. To the left-hand side of the chart-room was a bunk where, in rough weather, the captain was accustomed to sleep, and screwed against the wall on the right of the room was a mahogany bench, which answered the double purpose of a table and a box, and inside this box the compasses and weather-recording machines of the yacht were carried.

As Mr. Creed entered the chart-room it was not these things that interested him so much as the maps that were arranged about the room like roller blinds. He went over to one of these marked South America and, having pulled it down, he examined it carefully through his spectacles.

The next thing that Mr. Creed did was extraordinary, for, moving back to the door, he saw that it was firmly locked, and then he covered the portholes. Mr. Creed's movements in the chart-room were most remarkable. First he smiled, then he looked very grave, and then he would chuckle softly to himself as though some idea in his mind was tickling him immensely.

After a little while he moved over to the mahogany bench and sat down in front of it. Then he looked carefully about him,

and drew from his pocket a map which he studied keenly.

"Yes," he said to himself; "that would be the best way—much the best way."

Anyone in that chart-room at that moment would have fancied that Mr. Creed was contemplating some scheme that was aimed against Hal and Dick and the bos'n, for when a knock came at the door, and, on opening it, Hal's smiling face came to view, a look of evident displeasure settled on Mr. Creed's face, and he conveyed to Hal the idea that he was not wanted at that moment in the chart-room.

With a look of surprise on his face Hal hurried back to the game.

The bos'n had just bowled Dick, and it was Nan's turn to bat. Dick and Nan were playing Hal and the bos'n, and up to the moment of Hal's arrival on the scene Dick had only scored six runs, whilst the bos'n and the elder Irving had made twenty.

"Here you are at last, Hal!" cried the bos'n. "It's your turn to bowl. Dick only made six, so we ought to win."

Smilingly Hal took the ball and giving a short run he bowled to Nan.

Now Nan had played ordinary games,

quiet games such as deck quoits and draughts, but this was her first appearance in a game of cricket on the "Albatross."

Of course, Hal thought that she would be bowled out in a few moments, but judge of his surprise, when Nan Nothing calmly stopped the first balls, and when she had made her position firm, and had become used to Hal's bowling, she commenced to hit out.

Nan's arms were strong, and she wielded the bat well, hitting out so that she mounted the runs up in no time.

"Strike me colours," cried old Bill, "but here is a real cricketer, Hal. We shall have to play as well as we know how to win this little game."

But change the bowling as they might, or try as hard as they could, Nan still stayed in, and it was only when she had made double the score of the bos'n and Hal put together that she laid down her bat.

"Bravo!" cried Dick who, although not much at games himself, admired prowess in others. "Nan, you saved us. You *can* play cricket."

"We had better have another side, Hal," the bos'n said, a trifle gloomily. It hurt his dignity to be beaten by one so young as Nan.

When Mr. Creed's work was completed he put the map in his pocket and, opening the door of the chart-room, he came to where the bos'n and Hal and Dick were playing.

"I'll play now, boys," he said, and play he did, though all the time he glanced keenly towards the cook's galley, and when Michaels came up from below, as if to get a breath of fresh air, it was Mr. Creed's eyes that watched him wherever he went.

"You are always looking at Michaels, guardian," said Dick when the man was out of earshot. "Your eyes never leave him."

A slight frown came over Mr. Creed's face, and for a second he did not speak.

"I think you make a mistake, Dick," he said. "Anyhow, do not speak of it again until we are off the deck. Then you shall know my reason."

Mr. Creed had been rather a good batsman when he had been at school, and he had not forgotten the game at all. He and Nan were playing the other three, and Mr. Creed was scoring rapidly. Somehow he always kept driving the ball past the cook's galley, and in running sometimes he could not stop

before he had come abreast of the place; Michaels, attracted above by all the excitement, was watching the game.

Mr. Creed had made one of his usual strokes when in running he fell, and in falling came against the top of the companion-way where Michaels was lolling. None of the players noticed a piece of paper slip from Mr. Creed's pocket as he lay there, but Michaels was quick to see it and, planting his foot over it, he lifted Mr. Creed to his feet.

"Thank you, Michaels," said the boys' guardian. "I must not run so fast. I am not as young as once I was."

He picked up his spectacles and, re-adjusting them on the bridge of his nose, he walked back to the wickets and the game continued.

Eventually Mr. Creed and Nan proved much too strong for the others, and Nan was the happy recipient of much congratulation from the boys.

"You see," she said, "I have always played cricket, Hal. I love the game."

When Dick and Nan hurried away to store the stumps, Hal drew the bos'n for'ard.

"Look here, bos'n," he said to Bill, "I can't understand what has come over

guardian. You heard how he spoke to Dick just now. He is always working, and I cannot make him out at all. I feel somehow that something mysterious is going on the whole time on board."

"Shiver me whiskers," said Bill excitedly, "but that is just what I have been thinking myself. It has all cropped up in the last few days. Strange looks, silences, and then all that mysterious work of Mr. Creed's. Faith, but I can't understand it."

"Look here, bos'n, I think we ought to ask guardian what on earth is the matter. What do you say?"

Bos'n Bill scratched his head thoughtfully, and gazed out to sea.

Suddenly he looked up.

"Hal," he said, "you're right. We'll bring the matter up after dinner. It's high time all this secrecy and cat-work was put a stop to, or the mystery, if mystery there be one, explained to us."

With that Bill and Hal went below, and soon they were followed by Mr. Creed.

The dinner was a very quiet one, for Dick, after his snubbing on deck, did not feel that he wanted to talk, and the bos'n and Hal were reserving their conversation for the

moment when the steward left them all alone together.

It was when the door was closed softly behind his back, when the last sounds of his footsteps had echoed back to where the four sat, that Hal leaned forward and touched Bill's arm.

The bos'n looked up and, smiling softly, turned to Mr. Creed.

"Dick was quite right in what he said to you to-day," began the bos'n. "Somehow you watch Michaels as a cat watches a mouse, and you've been very mysterious recently. Hal and I want to know what is going on."

"Yes, guardian," said Hal; "you mustn't think me rude or anything like that, but I have kept on wondering these days what was the meaning of all this extraordinary work and this strange manner that has suddenly come over you. Are you sorry you came, or cross with Dick or myself?"

Mr. Creed leant back in his chair and laughed harder than he had ever laughed before.

"Well, well!" he said. "If that doesn't beat everything. Just when the whole fascination of the voyage is coming to me

you ask me if I am sorry I came out in the 'Albatross.' "

" There's something wrong, guardian," said Dick. " You know there is."

The laughter left Mr. Creed's face, and, rising to his feet he went over to the door and, opening it, looked up the stairs. There was no one there. He came back into the cabin and, standing with his back against the door, looked at the other three.

" Do you know why I watch Michaels ? " he said softly.

A muttered " No " came from the bos'n but the boys did not speak.

" Because," said Mr. Creed softly, " he's one of Garcia's spies. That is why I watch Michaels and have appeared strange."

He came to the table—came to where the bos'n had risen, his face the picture of surprise.

" It would never have done to have told every one what was going on," continued Mr. Creed. " So I just watched and waited my opportunity to find out what Michaels knows. At present he hasn't learnt much, but this much I know. Another ship is following us, and Michaels signals the direction by night. I've seen him."

A relieved look came over Hal's face, and Dick was smiling at the bos'n.

"You were quite right, Mr. Creed," said Bill. "It was better as one man's secret, and now, through your care, the danger becomes less. It would never do to let Michaels know that we realize he is a spy."

"Michaels came here for one thing," said Mr. Creed quietly, "and that thing was the parchment from the sword."

"You have the map still?" said Hal, excitedly, going over to Mr. Creed's side.

Mr. Creed was going to speak when suddenly from above came the hurrying of feet, and then the sound of a splash.

"Man overboard—man overboard!" the cry echoed through the night, and the bos'n rushed towards the cabin door.

He turned the handle and sought to open it, but the door would not budge.

"Michaels has done his work well," said the bos'n. "He's locked us all in."

But a few moments before Bos'n Bill said this, a figure had stolen softly from the cook's galley and, screened by the shadows on the deck, had crept down the companion-way that led to the saloon where Mr. Creed and the boys were dining.

It was Michaels.

There was a grim smile on his face as he crept to the cabin door and carefully, very softly, turned the key. Then Michaels hurried from the cabin and, mounting to the deck, ran aft. From his pocket he took his torch, and with many rapid movements he flashed a signal to a ship in the distance. He could see her lights.

Then he shut off his torch, and with a cry of "Man overboard!" he ran to where the dinghy hung on the davits. It was the work of a few minutes to get her into the water, and as the vessel slowed up Michaels, the man who was "only" a cook, proved his seamanship by swarming down the rope into the little craft.

As he unshipped his oars and rowed off into the night a sardonic smile played upon his lean features.

When he had rowed away some distance from the "Albatross" he rested on his oars and looked at the ship. She had now stopped, and could Michaels have witnessed the scene on her decks he would have discovered it to be one of great activity.

The crew were rushing hither and thither,

and the captain had recognized the clothes that lay on the deck.

"It's Michaels," said the captain with amazement. "It's hopeless to try and save him now."

He had just finished speaking when a sailor named Sandford ran up.

"The dinghy's gone from the davits, sir," he said. "The cook must have taken the boat and set up the cry of 'Man overboard' to give him time to run away. He knew we would stop the yacht, sir."

"Yes," said the captain, "that must have been it," and then, "Hurry down and call Mr. Creed and the bos'n. There's something strange here."

The man ran away down to the chief cabin, but he was back in a minute with surprise written over every line of his face.

"The cabin, sir—Mr. Creed—the door's locked and they can't get out!"

Brushing the sailor aside Captain Sefton hurried along the deck, and ran below to the saloon.

As he came nearer he could hear the sound of hammering blows on the door, and the cries of the bos'n.

"Hi there!" called out the old sailor.

"Are you all asleep aloft? There's something gone wrong on the good ship 'Albatross.' "

As Captain Sefton tried the door and found it locked he knew indeed that there was something wrong, for it was not under his instructions that the occupants of the saloon had been shut in.

"It's all right," he called out. "I'm here—Sefton—and we will soon have you all out." With that he raced away to return in a few moments with the ship's carpenter, and some of the stronger members of the crew. In no time they had the door open.

Mr. Creed was the first to hurry on deck, where he found the captain, who, with the work of releasing the saloon occupants well on its way, had come on deck to see if there was any sign of Michaels.

"Well captain," said Mr. Creed, "and what has happened?"

Captain Sefton indicated the cook's discarded clothes, and was about to speak when one of the crew came up, and, touching his forelock, said :

"The dinghy's gone, sir, and Parsons, the cook's mate, found this in the galley."

He handed over a piece of paper, torn evidently from an old exercise book.

A puzzled expression came to the captain's face, and he turned to Mr. Creed, who had now been joined by the boys and Nan and the bos'n.

"I can't make head or tail of this," he said.
"Perhaps you can, Mr. Creed?"

The boys' guardian took the paper and carefully scanned it.

A smile slowly settled on Mr. Creed's face, and then he read out:

"Good luck to your precious treasure hunt. Take care the 'Black Heather' doesn't arrive first.—MORGAN."

The bos'n whistled softly, and a look of surprise came over Hal's face.

"So his name wasn't Michaels after all," said Hal sharply. And he would have spoken again, but the bos'n had come to Mr. Creed's side.

"Morgan," he said. "Morgan—I know the name now. Morgan is Garcia's first mate, and Garcia's ship is the 'Black Heather.'"

"But what does he mean about the

'Black Heather' arriving first?" put in Dick.

"Yes," said Nan, who was now in the great secret. "They would want a map of the island—a map like ours." She said "ours" proudly, for by now Nan considered herself quite one of the moving spirits in the expedition.

The colour left Hal's face, and he caught at his guardian's arm.

"The map, guardy," he said quickly. "You haven't lost the map?"

Slowly Mr. Creed's hand went into his breast pocket, and he withdrew his papers and sorted them over.

"There's no map here. Now——"

"Not gone!" said the bos'n excitedly. "You haven't lost the most valuable piece of paper in the world?"

"There is no map here," said Mr. Creed. "The one I had has certainly been taken by Michaels or Morgan, as he really is."

"The thief," said Dick. "So all our adventure is ruined."

"What a shame!" put in Nan. "But isn't he still on board?"

The bos'n frowned.

"No, Nan," he said. "The man has

taken one of the boats, and by now is miles away, perhaps on board Garcia's ship."

Hal whistled softly, and walked moodily away.

Dick hurried to his side. "Don't worry, Hal," he said kindly. "Everything will come right soon. We must get that map back."

Mr. Creed was still smiling strangely, and it was his smile that, to a certain extent, was worrying Captain Sefton and the bos'n.

"You don't seem a bit upset, Mr. Creed," said the bos'n, a little curtly. "This means a lot to Hal."

"You haven't given me time to explain yet," was the reply. "But come along with me all of you; we must discuss this matter in secret."

Walking towards the chart-room, Mr. Creed linked his arm through Hal's, and it was together and followed by Nan and Dick, the bos'n and Captain Sefton, that the two came to the chart-room.

When they were all inside, Mr. Creed carefully locked the door and screened the portholes, then he turned to the others.

"You really will have to cheer up," he

said quietly. " You look so dismal and sad, you almost make me cry."

" Well," said the bos'n, " aren't you dismal and sad at the loss of the map ? "

" Not at all," said Mr. Creed, with conviction in his tones. " A map has certainly been lost, but if Michaels has been foolish enough to take a map that I purposely let fall from my pocket whilst we were playing cricket when the real map was not so very far away, he is mad, that is all."

" You mean ? " said Hal.

Mr. Creed did not speak, but slowly he moved over to the cord that was attached to the centre of the big roller map of South America, and quickly pulled the map down.

" I don't see that that brings us any nearer what we have lost," said the bos'n.

The next moment Mr. Creed swung the broad sheet of canvas over. There on the back, pasted neatly and safely, was a little faded map—*it was the map of the Isle of Shells*.

He did not take any heed of Hal's look of relief, of the bos'n's cry. He simply smiled a very quiet and assured smile.

" You really would have thought that Michaels would have looked in a chart-room for a chart, wouldn't you ? " he said.

Nan's eyes were twinkling with laughter, and she had run to Mr. Creed, and slipped her arm through his.

"So there will be adventures, after all?" she said happily. "I thought we would all have to go back home again."

"Mr. Creed," said the bos'n, heartily, "I think Hal and Dick will agree with me that as long as we leave things in your hands they are safe enough."

"That they are," echoed the boys, as they caught impulsively at their guardian's hand.

Then a broad grin spread over Hal's face, and the next moment he burst out into prolonged laughter.

"Hi! Heave to!" said the bos'n. "You'll wreck the ship."

But Hal went on laughing as though he couldn't stop.

"Michaels—Michaels!" he exclaimed, between his fits of laughter. "Can't you see Michaels?"

Then they realized what was amusing Hal, and individually they had a picture of Garcia's lieutenant handing his chief the map.

"Poor old Michaels," cried the bos'n; "hasn't he been tricked nicely?" The next

moment a curious scene could have been witnessed in the chart-room of the good ship "Albatross."

Dick had caught hold of Nan, and Hal had taken Mr. Creed's arm, whilst the bos'n and Captain Sefton were dancing a sea-jig.

"So-ho, so-he! but a merry little band are we!" chanted old Bill. "We're out on pleasure searching for treasure, and we've left poor Morgan up a tree."

Loud and prolonged laughter broke out in the chart-room, and one of the crew who heard the noise went back to tell his friends that surely all the others of the expedition had gone mad.

As indeed they had, at the thought of how the scoundrel of a cook had been outwitted.

CHAPTER IV

THE STORM

IT was three evenings later that Mr. Creed sprang another surprise on the rest of the party, and the surprise came during dinner in the saloon.

“ Well, bos’n,” he said calmly, “ I have come to the conclusion on one point, and that is that Garcia’s ship is no longer following us.”

Mr. Creed turned to Captain Sefton. “ Yes, captain, I have watched day and night now, and there has been no sign of a ship by day, and no lights at night; and so my suggestion that we should adopt a zigzag course was in the main a good one.”

“ We have entirely thrown them off the track, I should say,” replied the captain; “ and I must say, Mr. Creed, that we owe not a little to you.”

Leaving Mr. Creed, Captain Sefton, and the bos’n deep in conversation, Dick and

Hal and Nan hurried above for a last game before going to bed for the night.

Below Captain Sefton and the bos'n had become a trifle serious.

Captain Sefton leaned across the table, and looked keenly into the bos'n's face.

"Bos'n," he said, "you know these signs too well not to realize that all this fine weather means that soon there will be a sudden change. I've sailed in these seas before, and these sudden spells of cloudless days, this lack of wind and smoothness of seas mean one thing, and one thing only."

The older sailor nodded. "You're perfectly right, Sefton. But what makes you think the change is coming soon?"

"The glass," was the reply. "That, and the sudden winds, soft though they are—the fact that they are coming in gusts means a change."

The yacht gave a slight lurch.

"There you are," continued Sefton. "Soon that lurch will become more regular, and then at last bad, very bad weather will set in."

As for Hal and Nan and Dick, on deck they were marvelling at the change that had come over the sea. It was getting

towards late evening, and in place of the smooth waters they were now choppy and looked angry, and a spiteful wind shook the yacht at times.

"There's going to be a storm," said Dick, slowly. "Look at those black clouds over there, Hal."

Hal looked.

"Won't that be fun, Dick," he said. "I have never been at sea in a real storm, have you, Nan?" he said, turning to the girl at his side.

"I should say I have, Hal," was the reply. "Just a few days after we had left Madeira we were all battened below, as the waves were coming right over the boat; but I would much sooner have been above as it was so close. I hope if we have a storm now they won't let us stop below, but will give us a chance of seeing the waves."

With the arrival on deck of the bos'n, Hal and Dick went below, as it was turning-in time, and although they slept well there was not much sleep for either Bill or Captain Sefton.

At midnight the wind had risen, and the seas were becoming really tremendous, and it was as much as the crew could do to make

everything snug before the storm broke, for it had come with such suddenness.

In place of the still, hot air had come a cold and a rain-drenched wind, and the yacht seemed to stagger under the impact of the heavy waves that broke over it.

Captain Sefton remained on the bridge, and the bos'n took turns with the chief mate of the boat to lend a hand on deck.

By morning the sea was a sight for a true sailor's eyes. As far as the eye could reach white-capped rollers could be viewed, and one moment the yacht would be in a watery valley and the next moment riding on the crest of a tremendous wave.

"We shall have to batten down," cried Sefton from the bridge. "It would be too dangerous for the boys and Nan to be on deck in this."

It was soon after he had spoken that Hal was awakened in a very dramatic fashion. A rather larger sea than usual had flung him out of his bunk against the bulkhead, and he was quick to realize what had happened.

"Wake up, Dick!" cried Hal, as he scrambled to his feet and commenced to dress. He waited until Dick was ready, and then the two staggered above, for the yacht

was rocking in such a fashion that it was quite an effort to keep their balance.

When they at last reached the deck the wind almost blew them off their feet, and Dick was for going below again, but Hal, imbued with the spirit of adventure, refused and, leaving Dick to cling on to the companion-way rail, he forced his way amidships.

First on one side and then on the other, the waves rose like mountains, and the sea was dashing in mad abandon over the fore-part of the "Albatross."

Hal's eyes lighted on a piece of rope, and it was his quick reasoning that told him it would be better to tie this around his waist, so that in the event of a big sea coming inboard he would not be carried out by it when it left the ship.

He wound the rope around him, and tied it firmly, and then he fixed this to the yacht's rail, and watched the progress of the storm.

From the chart-room he was hailed by the bos'n.

" You shouldn't have come on deck, Hal," cried Bill. " It's much too risky ; but see that you are tied safely, and work your way back."

Hal held on, and as he did so he saw

something that made him more nervous than was his wont.

Away down the ship he could see Nan's laughing face—and Nan was in danger!

"I crawled in the cook's galley, Hal," cried Nan. "Isn't it a wonderful sight? I think I will come along to you."

Before Hal could cry to her not to try such a dangerous thing she had hurried from her place of safety, and was half running, half crawling along the deck.

It looked as though she would reach Hal, but just then a giant wave broke over the ship, and, catching Nan in its twirling mass of foam, lifted her, and then cast her down by the ship's rail.

"My ankle," cried Nan, as she tried to rise. "I think I have strained my ankle, Hal."

With fascinated eyes Hal could see that another big wave, bigger than the last, was coming down on the ship. It was a dangerous thing to do, but he did it. Rushing along the deck, he picked Nan up in his arms, and held her tightly. The wave broke. It caught them both up, and carried them across the ship. Hal fancied that he could never hold on, but he set his teeth hard, and

although the strain was terrific he still held Nan until slowly the sea slipped away, and he was able to carry her to where Dick was standing by the companion-rail.

"You'd better get changed, Nan," said Hal laughingly. "You're quite drenched."

"But I want to see the storm," said Nan. "You are staying here, aren't you?"

Hal shook his head.

"No, Nan," he replied; "it's too dangerous."

He was about to speak again, when——

"Batten down the hatchways!" cried Captain Sefton. "The seas are rising."

The bos'n hurried Hal and Nan below, and when they were safely in the saloon cabin he motioned some of the crew to help him in making everything snug, for by now the seas were coming inboard continually, and instead of abating they were rising, and the wind was growing in intensity.

Bill caught on to a rail as a larger sea than the rest hit the vessel and, rising in a tower of spray, fell in a drenching shower on the deck.

"Splice me mainbrace," he said to himself. "But I didn't bargain for a bath, and without my oilskins, too." He fought his way to

the chart-room, and it was there that he found a spare suit that he hastened to put on.

He had turned away for a moment, when slowly the mahogany box in which the compasses were stored gave forth a noise, and the next moment the lid lifted to reveal a laughing face.

It was Dick's. Determined not to miss the storm, he had crept from his place of safety, and had hidden in the chart-room whilst the work of battening down had been going on.

“Any more for the lifeboat?” he said, laughingly, and, as the bos'n turned with surprise writ large on his face, he could not refrain from smiling himself.

“Come out of that you young rascal!” he said, as, running forward, he caught hold of Dick's collar and dragged him out of the box. “Do you know you are acting against the captain's commands? He's ordered every one below.”

Dick looked a trifle shamefaced, and the bos'n turned away to conceal his amusement. “Storms and tempests!” murmured the old sailor. “But this is rank mutiny and in my day they would have tied me to the main-mast for this.”

There was an unmistakable chuckle in the old salt's voice, and Dick knew it; for he turned and looked into Bill's smiling eyes.

"I'm glad that I didn't live then, bos'n," he said. "But I had to be on deck in this, because Nan was saying how 'stuffy' it gets below decks during a storm."

"So it's Nan who is at the bottom of this mutiny, is it?" cried Bill. "Well, well, there's only one thing for it, lad, we must find you some oilskins, and then you can help me and the crew."

A search about the chart-room revealed a cabin-boy's set of oilskins, and into these Dick got as Bill stamped about the room talking about flogging and mutiny until his breath was nearly gone. As a matter of fact, Bill rather admired Dick for showing his pluck in this manner, and it was the old sailor who cautioned the boy against the risks of getting near hurtling seas.

All through the day the wind howled and the seas dashed against the "Albatross"; but Dick could not help but admire the marvellous way in which the trim yacht weathered the waves. She rose upon the mountainous sea-tops, and slid smoothly into

the green and angry valleys of sea, as though it were the easiest thing in the world.

Below, Hal and Nan were playing quiet games, wondering what had become of Dick, and it was only when the weather had improved and they were allowed to come on deck that they learnt of Dick's luck.

"Well, bos'n, I think that it is really too bad," said Hal and Nan together. "Here have we been in the saloon, being thrown here and there, whilst Dick has been having a fine time on board."

Just then Dick appeared. His oilskin cap had gone, and he was taking off his coat to show his drenched clothes below, whilst his hair looked as though he had just come out of a bath, as indeed he had, of a kind.

"If you would like it, Hal," he said, laughing, "I can give you my word that I didn't. I have never had such a soaking, and as for seeing anything, it was impossible, what with the rain and the spray."

Nan and Hal laughed. "No, I don't think we've missed much, do you, Nan?" said Hal, as the bos'n bundled Dick below to make a rapid change.

It was Nan's voice, raised to almost a

shrill cry, that gave a dramatic change to the conversation.

“Look, Hal!” she cried. “Look!” And she pointed to where in the distance something, some large object, was coming out of the faint mist that had settled over the sea with the coming of evening.

The bos’n’s and Hal’s eyes turned towards the direction that Nan had indicated, and as they did so a cry came from the look-out.

“Derelict to starboard!” he cried, and the next minute the engines of the yacht slowed down and the voice of the captain could be heard crying commands to the engine-room.

“What can it be, Hal?” said Nan, catching at Hal’s arm and approaching the side of the yacht.

The bos’n turned.

“It’s not an unusual thing,” he said, “to find a craft like that on the sea after such a storm as we have experienced. No doubt another ship came upon her when she was in distress, and took the crew and passengers off and left her to her fate.”

He scanned the ship, now plainly to be seen through his glass.

“What a battering she has had!” he

exclaimed. "Her masts have gone—she was evidently an old merchantman engaged in coastwise trade. There is a sail dragging aft and the seas have wrecked the bridge."

"What an experience," said Hal. "I'm glad we happened to come across it, bos'n."

Bill smiled.

"I remember once getting weed-bound on the edge of the Sargasso Sea, and as far as the eye could reach you could see derelicts."

"What—a sea full of derelicts?" said Nan, in surprise.

Old Bill took a pinch of snuff and for a moment did not speak. At last he turned to the girl and smiled.

"Yes," he said, "a sea full of them, Nan. The Sargasso Sea is a sea that has no movement, and it is clogged with weeds. When once you get in those weeds it is almost impossible to get out. But we had an energetic skipper in those days—none other than Hal's father, lass—and it was due to his dogged perseverance that we got free from that sea of lost ships."

"What a wonderful escape!" exclaimed Hal. "Will you tell us the whole story one day, bos'n?"

"I'll tell it you to-morrow," replied the bos'n, "but there's no time now. Do you see the look-out? He's seen a sign of life on board that waterlogged hulk, and he's just signalled it to the bridge."

The yacht had now come to a standstill, and the wreck was so near that it could be carefully scanned. Broken and battered it still rode the waves with an air of jaunty defiance to the elements, but there was an unsteady lurch about it that, so the bos'n said, denoted the fact that the hold was filled with water. She was very much down in the stern, and there was a mass of tangled wreckage hanging over the forepart of the ship.

Suddenly out upon the air broke the unmistakable sound of a dog barking, and the next minute a decrepit-looking terrier dashed to the bows of the boat and, getting to the highest point to which it could climb, barked lustily, as though conscious that help was at hand.

"Poor little thing!" said Nan, as she looked at the animal. And then, "Of course, we shall save it, bos'n."

Bill smiled. "Yes, little lady," he replied. "There's always a soft spot in a sailor's heart

for an animal found at sea. And especially a dog, the most faithful animal in the world. Why, I've known——” He was just about to go into the story of another dog found at sea, when the voice of Captain Sefton ordering a boat away broke into his experience, and the bos'n hurried away to lend a hand.

Dick and Mr. Creed had joined Nan and Hal now, and the four watched the boat hasten towards the derelict. As the craft drew nearer to the hulk the dog barked all the more exultantly, and when at last the boat was quite near, sensible animal that it was, it gave a leap into the water, and the next moment a pair of sturdy arms had brought it into the boat, and she was being pulled back to the “Albatross.”

As the boat shot alongside the yacht Nan rushed to the gangway, and it was into her arms that the damp, but otherwise very cheerful, animal was placed.

“Two castaways,” said Mr. Creed, as he saw the loving way in which Nan petted the dog. “We shall soon have a very full ship, bos'n.”

Bill smiled. “We'll make the dog cook in place of that rogue Michaels,” he said.

“We shouldn't have much to eat, then,”

put in Hal. And Dick laughed, for a sailor had brought some food, and the rescued terrier was eating it at no end of a rate.

At once the dog was made one of the group of treasure hunters, and when he had fed he showed his appreciation of the honour by wagging his tail and cocking his ear as though to say, "Thank you very much. I am sure we shall all be chums."

It was to Nan, though, that he showed the most consideration, and it was voted by the assembly that the dog should be Nan's pet, and that she should christen it."

"Call him Peter," said Hal. "Peter is such a jolly name."

Nan's face lit up. "Peter it shall be," she said, and there and then the terrier was christened, and whilst the ceremony was in progress there was such a cherubic smile on his face that Mr. Creed declared that he was sure the animal understood what was happening.

It was late that evening when the party turned in, and they slept soundly and undisturbed; for the storm had passed and the sea was calm again.

After the great storm a period of perfect weather set in, and apart from a rough sea

one evening, three days out from Rio de Janeiro, the sea was like a placid pool by day and by night. Peter had become quite an acquisition to the party, and at fielding the ball when a game of cricket was on he proved a marvel.

They had all tired of games, though, by the time the yacht sighted land, and the excitement on board when the white harbour of Rio de Janeiro appeared in the distance can well be imagined.

The bos'n sang, and Nan and Hal danced with wild excitement, whilst even Peter barked with enthusiasm, as though he knew that one lap in the race for the treasure was finished.

As they neared Rio native craft manned by olive-skinned Creoles came alongside, and fruit and curiosities were offered to the new arrivals.

"Watch that Brazilian diver," said the bos'n, who knew Rio de Janeiro well. "He will do some extraordinary things."

The man was standing in the prow of a little boat, and was calling out in Spanish to those who watched him. Evidently old Bill knew what he was saying, for diving his hand into the pocket of his voluminous trousers

he drew out some small coins, and one of these he tossed into the sea.

It had not struck the water when the Brazilian had dived in, and they could see his figure beneath the clear surface of the water. The next minute he reappeared with the water falling from his head in silver cascades. In his teeth was the coin.

Again and again the watchers on the "Albatross" threw their small change into the sea, and the diver did not make one mistake. He always came up with the money between his teeth.

"That's real diving," said the bos'n, as he turned away and drew the attention of his charges to the busy scene in the harbour itself.

At last the "Albatross" was safely in port, and it was Mr. Creed who voted a little jaunt ashore.

"Just to stretch our legs, and to give Peter a run. What do you say?" he said.

Needless to remark, Nan and the boys were all anxiety to have a look round this city of white buildings, and it was a happy party that finally stepped ashore and walked off into the town.

It was the shops that interested Hal and

Dick most, and with Peter at their heels they wandered about looking at the strange things for sale. Fruits, the like of which the boys had never seen before, almost made their mouths water, but it was the "beggars" who interested Nan.

"They seem to be everywhere," she said. But Mr. Creed laughed. "Those are not beggars," he explained. "The Brazilian is a lover of ease, Nan, and those lounging figures are just the people of Rio taking their rest after the work of the day."

Hal and Dick had a hearty laugh at Nan's expense, but the laugh soon died away, for Dick had gone rather too near to a man upon whose shoulder a monkey was perched, and the monkey caught at Dick's cap and, taking it off, put it on his own head so that he looked most strange. At any ordinary moment this would have made every one laugh, but not so now, for, instead of returning the cap, the man had snatched it roughly from the monkey and was putting it in his pocket.

Dick approached the Brazilian and held out his hand, but he only smiled between his teeth, and was about to turn away when Hal came forward and caught at his arm. The man swung round and there was a dangerous

look in his eyes as he raised his arm as if to strike. The blow never fell, for Peter, sensing what was happening, had caught at the Brazilian's trousers and in a fright the man dropped the cap and ran off, pursued by Peter, who was barking lustily.

"Good old Peter!" said Hal, who was now laughing so that he could hardly stand up straight.

"Have you ever seen anyone so frightened, Dick?"

Dick had to confess that he hadn't, and when Peter returned he came in for no end of congratulations.

His tail wagged and he rubbed himself against the legs of all in turn, as if to say that he was partly paying back the debt he owed for his being saved from the sea.

All this had happened in a moment and whilst Mr. Creed's back had been turned, but now he came from the shop into which he had been looking and the party proceeded on its voyage of discovery.

At last Mr. Creed realized it was time to return to the "Albatross," so they turned back and were soon at the harbour and on board the ship. As they climbed on to the deck, from out to sea came the note of a siren

and, with the last rays of the sun reflecting on her black sides, a ship steamed slowly into the harbour.

She was a sleek ship and a strange one, so Hal thought as he watched her thread her way to a berth that had been prepared for her; but he was not ready to hear the surprising news the bos'n had to impart. The old salt came near him.

"Why!" exclaimed old Bill. "Do you see that ship, Hal?"

"I was watching it just now," said Hal, as he turned round. "What about it, bos'n?"

A smile settled on the sailor's face, and he looked keenly at the approaching vessel.

"She's Garcia's ship—she's the 'Black Heather,'" was all he said.

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As the two watched the "Black Heather" a little thrill ran through their veins. Neither of them could really get away from the idea that this interest of Garcia's in the Treasure of the Incas added considerably to the excitement of their quest.

"It's not to be won so easily, Hal, after all," said the bos'n, as he watched the thin stream of black smoke break from the tramp's funnel

and float off to merge into the blue of the evening sky.

Hal smiled, and the smile was one of rigid determination. "No, bos'n," he said. "But it is the fighting that makes it worth while."

"Spoken like your father's boy," said the old sailor; and, as Mr. Creed came to the side of the vessel with Captain Sefton, Bill indicated the ship that even then was moving slowly past them.

"Garcia has arrived," he said, softly. Mr. Creed paled, but the pallor had soon gone and, drawing Captain Sefton aside, he was soon busily chatting to him.

"Mr. Creed looks anxious," said Hal, as he watched the two. "What will happen now?"

Bill did not speak, for there was no necessity; a hoarse command, a rush of feet along the deck, a sudden awakening to life of the whole yacht more than answered Hal's query. They were to sail. There was not a shadow of doubt about that.

Soon lusty voices were chanting a song of the sea and strong arms were casting off rope and chain, the anchor creaked into her position at the ship's side, and slowly the

“Albatross” lurched away from the dock-side. Her head was turned to sea and in a few minutes she was outward bound again, the white buildings of Rio de Janeiro fading into the distance as the yacht lifted her head and raced away.

Nan was running towards Hal, and she was followed by Dick. “Hurrah!” she cried. “Mr. Creed says it is the last lap, Hal.”

“Yes,” put in Dick, almost out of breath after chasing Nan, “we are out really to search for the island now.”

“And it’s going to be a hard job, I can tell you all,” said the bos’n, with conviction in his tones. “Searching for a particular island in this sea is like looking for a needle in a haystack.”

“Well, search or no search,” said Nan, “I think, bos’n, that there’s time for one of your stories before we go off to bed, eh, Hal?”

Hal caught hold of the old salt’s arm and, with the assistance of Dick and Nan, Bill was dragged to the old barrel, and when he had seated himself upon it they grouped themselves on the deck at his feet.

“Now, what’s it to be?” he said, smiling. “Is it to be a wreck, pirates, or a story of land adventure?”

Nan looked up.

"Dick had his choice last night, bos'n," she said. "So I think it is my turn now. Tell us a story about pirates—I simply love pirate stories."

Old Bill scratched his head, and thought deeply for a moment or two. "Well," he said at last, "I can't say, Nan, that I have really had much to do with pirates, but what little experience I have had of such gentry I will tell a tale about."

The bos'n looked at Hal and very solemnly he closed one eye. Nan did not see this but Dick did, and Dick was quite prepared for what followed.

"Well," began the bos'n, "it was many years ago and in these very same seas that I was cruising in the good ship 'Estella'—a sailing ship, she was, fully rigged, and a fine sight she made I can tell you when the wind was fresh, and she cut her way through the waves like some great white bird on the wing.

"The 'Estella' was bound for the port from which we have just come," said the bos'n, "and her captain was a tall Scotsman of the name of Finlay. He hailed from Cromarty, and had won the name there of being the bravest man in the North Sea fishing fleet,

an occupation he had followed before he went in for real sailoring.

“ We were just ten days out from Rio when we fell in with a curious-looking ship that followed in our course and to all our signals made no reply, and one day we were rather surprised to see that they had run a cannon out at her bows and, worse than that, there was a flag running up at the halyards, and that flag was a pirate flag ! ”

Nan’s eyes were bright and shining and she was listening to the bos’n so intently that it was as much as Dick and Hal could do to restrain their laughter.

“ Well,” continued the bos’n, “ Finlay was called, and when he saw that cannon he laughed as I have never heard a man laugh before. It was so loud that they heard it on the ‘ pirate,’ and we heard afterwards that the cook fainted with fright when he heard Finlay’s laugh.

“ The next thing that happened was a summons from the following ship to lay-to and prepare to receive a boat they were going to send, so Finlay bade the signaller tell them that if they would send a boat we would heave-to and receive it.

“ We did. The boat came away from the

other craft and Finlay waited on the top of the ladder as the pirate's lieutenant came aboard to demand our surrender."

Old Bill smiled. "The next thing that happened," he continued, "was not what the enemy expected. Finlay caught that lieutenant up in his arms and, holding him over the ship's side, just dropped him into the boat they had sent. It crumpled up like a toy canoe, and then Finlay laughed again, and that laugh had such a lot of power in it that it made the pirate captain shiver.

"But Finlay hadn't finished there. The first shot the enemy ship fired he caught and with unerring aim flung back at the ship that had hoped to capture us. It hit the barque full and fair, and when it had exploded there was nothing of the ship to be seen, and then, Nan, what do you think happened?"

Nan shook her head.

"Tell me, tell me!" she said, quickly.

"Well," said Bill, leaning forward, "I turned in my bunk, Nan, and woke up. It was a dream, and you can take it from me the nearest they can get to pirates on the sea nowadays is Garcia."

Hal and Dick were laughing now, and poor Nan was blushing as red as a beetroot.

" You *would* have pirates, Nan," they said. And then, " I say, bos'n, will you tell Nan about that whale you captured with a piece of string and a bent pin ? "

After that general pandemonium ensued, Nan getting up and chasing Hal and Dick until the kindly voice of Mr. Creed told them that it was time they were below, and that unless they went to bed now they would not be in time to see the island when they awoke.

At that they hastened to their bunks, and there was peace on the deck of the " Albatross "—peace and old Bill, who, with Mr. Creed, was discussing the best way to outwit Garcia and his crew.

CHAPTER V

AN UNCHARTED ISLAND

“ It’s no good, bos’n,” said Captain Sefton. “ Here we have put in at every island mentioned on the charts and maps, but there is not a solitary islet that answers to the descriptions on the old adventurer’s piece of parchment.”

“ Trim me topgallants, but you’re right there, Sefton,” said old Bill.

Hal and Dick and Nan were in the chart-room and there was a sad look on all their faces as the old bos’n spoke.

For weeks now the “ Albatross ” had been cruising about the islands that lie off the Brazilian seaboard, but with no success.

“ We’re *not* going to give up the hunt,” said Hal. “ It would be such a pity after all the worry we have had.”

Captain Sefton rolled his charts up, and put them back in their cases, and then he smiled wanly.

“ I think we will cruise about just for a

little longer," he said. "But if we don't find what we are searching for then it must be home again."

"Yes," put in Mr. Creed, "your education is being ruined, boys, and Nan will be such a tomboy when we get back home that the only place that we can send her to will be a menagerie where she can climb about with the monkeys."

Then Mr. Creed ran away with Nan in full chase, whilst Dick and Hal strolled aft, leaving the bos'n to chat over future operations with Captain Sefton.

Nan soon tired of running after Mr. Creed and, calling Hal and Dick, she suggested that they should make an exploration of the ship.

They started at the engine-room and watched the yacht's turbines running with a smoothness that fascinated them. But they tired of this, and found their way eventually into an old cabin that had been originally designed for a study for old Captain Irving when he was cruising or when on a special mission.

He had specially mentioned this cabin in his will and had asked that it might be preserved in memory of him.

Little did Nan know this as she scampered

about the place, clapping her hands at the sight of the ships' models that were hung on the oaken sides of the cabin, and laughing at the quaint birds, that, stuffed, served as ornaments to this place.

Dick and Hal were silent, for somehow here they felt near, very near, to the father whose courage and whose honour had been beyond question.

"I don't think we will play here, Nan," said Hal, softly. And then he told her the reason, and drew her out of the cabin, not hearing the gasp of surprise that came from Dick, the hasty exclamation, and then the silent scanning of a map that had fallen behind an old chest in which lay some bunting of a day long dead.

With trembling fingers Dick picked up the map and, spreading it out on the chest, he looked keenly at it. At school geography had been Dick's favourite subject and he was interested, deeply interested, in this time-worn map more for the reason that there was a spot on it ringed about by red pencil and marked "Probable spot of Island."

Then as the boy examined it more he realized a thing that had not struck either Hal or himself before. Skipper Irving had

learnt, evidently from some quarter other than the map in the sword, of the existence of a treasure island off the Brazilian coast; for here on this map the islands lying away from Rio de Janeiro were marked, and this map, different from the ones in the chart-room above, indicated an island, and underneath it was marked "Existence doubtful."

With careful hands Dick rolled the map up, and then he quickly left the old cabin of memories and, closing the door softly behind him, reverently almost, he hurried above.

It was a shrill whistle from Mr. Creed that drew Hal and Nan into the chart-room where they found the bos'n and Captain Sefton.

Mr. Creed stepped forward.

"Hal," he began, "when I read your father's will I fancied that the sword he left you might really lead you to something of value—but I am afraid that you are going to be very disappointed at what I am going to say."

Hal braced himself up, and looked firmly at Mr. Creed.

"I am not afraid, sir," he said. "But what is it that makes you speak like this?"

"Well," continued Mr. Creed. "It is this, Hal: Captain Sefton and the bos'n here

have decided that it is only waste of money going on looking for this island. They have searched the seas, and as there is no guide on the map to the locality of the treasure spot, we have decided amongst ourselves that the trip shall be given up and we make our way home."

Nan's face bore evidence of her disappointment, and Hal was just about to speak, when suddenly the cabin door was flung open, and Dick fell right amid the others.

"The island!" he cried. "I've found the island!"

Immediately the bos'n rushed out, and looked to sea.

"Why, Dick," he said, "I can't see it."

At that there was universal laughter, but the next minute it had stopped, for from beneath his coat Dick had drawn the map he had found in Skipper Irving's cabin, and one excited finger was pointing to a spot marked around with red chalk.

"Father knew," he said. "See, here is an island that is not marked on the other maps. It *must* be the Isle of Shells."

"Dearie me," said the bos'n. "I do believe that Dick is right."

Immediately all eyes were centred on the

map and a lively discussion took place between the men of the party.

"A lot of these islands," said Captain Sefton, "are just volcanic upheavals upon which, in some miraculous way, vegetation begins to grow."

It was later, seated on the old barrel, that the bos'n told a story that had been brought back to mind by what Sefton had said.

"Captain Sefton," he began, "was telling you how, in a miraculous way, the vegetation grew on a volcanic rock. Now, my story is of a kindly gentleman who, through his wonderful courage and kind nature, was rescued from imprisonment.

"Well," said the bos'n, "I must tell you first that all this happened in the days when the great Napoleon was Emperor of the French. Bonaparte had a friend whom we will call the count, and they were close friends, but one day the friends quarrelled, and the Emperor had his friend thrown into prison. The count's life now became very black and unhappy, for he was confined in a lonely cell.

"He tried to write, but tired of it; and at last, with no interest other than his cell, he began to look for little things that were out of the ordinary. One day a bird perched on the

prison window, and the count, with some bread saved over from his last meal, persuaded the little feathered thing to come into the cell to eat. The consequence was that day after day the bird came to visit the count, until at last the two became just as friendly as the count and the great Emperor had been. It was wonderful how changed the man's life was. He began to be interested again in everything and hoped for freedom. Some months afterwards he discovered a most curious fact. In the lightest corner of his cell he saw that a tiny plant was growing. What a delight it gave him ! After all, he thought, he was not alone, but into this darksome place the life of the outer world had come. He realized now that it must have been by the kindly agency of the bird that this plant had come to him ; the bird had dropped the seed no doubt on one of its visits.

“ That plant grew and grew. The count watched the leaves spreading out, and actually in its growth it had forced some of the stones apart. From a tiny seed it grew until its root was as thick as the count's arm, and then the count realized that the plant was showing a way to freedom, for the stones were being forced up—and,” continued the bos'n,

"to cut a long story short, through the count showing kindness to the bird he was one day able to complete the work the plant had started and make his way out of his cell through the opening in the stones that the roots of the plant had forced."

"But what happened afterwards?" asked Nan.

"Well," said the bos'n, "the story ends just as it should. The count found the Emperor and was able to regain his friendship, and that is the end of the story."

It was three days since Dick's dramatic discovery and those three days had worked wonders with the spirits of the party aboard the "Albatross."

A look of excitement came into old Bill's eyes.

"It must be the uncharted island," he said to Hal. "There's no land hereabouts." All was movement now on board the "Albatross." From the bridge Captain Sefton was busily engaged in giving instructions, and already the yacht had slowed down and the lead was being heaved.

Mr. Creed was on the bridge—an unusual thing—and, looking up, Hal could see that he was carefully examining a piece of paper

that was spread over the rail. "Bos'n," he cried, turning, "can you come along a minute?"

Old Bill left the group and hurried above, leaving Hal and Nan to speculate upon what had been Mr. Creed's discovery.

They were soon to know, for in a minute the bos'n returned and his face was radiant.

"Hal," he said, holding out his hand, "I have to congratulate you on the fact that over there"—he pointed to the island they were gradually nearing—"is the Isle of Shells, and if that old adventurer's story is true we may, one day, find the treasure."

"Your treasure," said Dick as Nan clapped her hands and then ran to the port side and watched the island.

It was a small piece of land, for she could see both ends with ease, and as the yacht neared a tiny bay between two high bluffs of sand a thrill ran through Nan's veins, for below one of the bluffs, half buried in the yellow sand, was the wreck of an old ship. Hal and Dick had joined her now, and they could plainly see the rusted iron lantern that had once graced the ship's prow.

"She was a galleon," said old Bill, excitedly. "A Spanish galleon. Don't you

see her high deck-line and the rusted gun on the starboard side?"

Hal did not speak. He was drinking in that most wonderful sight as the yacht drew nearer and nearer and finally came to a standstill between the two bluffs that quite concealed her from the sea.

The bay was a place of wonderful sands, and in the distance the party could see plainly how luxuriant was the undergrowth. Palm-trees and huge ferns lay there, and tall slender trees, all creeper-covered, that looked like lace patterns to the watchers on the deck.

"This is the Isle of Shells right enough," said Mr. Creed, who had now joined the group, "for it corresponds perfectly with the old map. I studied it carefully as we came in."

The bos'n was thoughtful and, taking his pipe from his mouth, he pointed with the stem towards the wrecked ship by the bluff.

"It looks very much as though the Spaniards knew of the treasure, and—" He would have gone on speaking, but Captain Sefton, who had come up, was before him.

"But they never got away, bos'n," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if we find that they fought amongst themselves, and the ship,

getting adrift, was caught in a storm and dashed back on the sand bluffs."

"Very likely," said the bos'n; "and perhaps—"

He would have continued, but suddenly the palm fronds near the bay moved, and a face peered with frightened eyes towards the "Albatross"—it was dark-skinned, and it was the face of a girl.

The hatchways had been cast off the "Albatross" and soon stores were being brought on deck.

Dick and Hal were working with might and main, for, truth to tell, they were all anxiety to make the landing.

What excitement there was when the decision was come to that the first boat should get away with the tents, for it had been decided that a camp should be made, and that some of the party should stay the night ashore.

The bos'n and Mr. Creed, thinking it only fair to Hal, told him that he would of course be in the first boat.

"Hurrah, Nan!" he cried when he took the news to Nan and Dick, "I shall be able to help in the building of the camp."

With regretful eyes the two watched the first boat pulling away, but Mr. Creed, who

was himself staying on board, softened their disappointment by telling them that they were to go the very next day as soon as a place had been prepared for them.

It had been evening time when Hal had left the "Albatross" and they saw him wave as the party disappeared in the undergrowth, looking for a suitable spot in which to pitch their camp.

They found it in a grassy glade between four palm-trees. From a rock near by gushed a limped stream of water which Hal tasted and pronounced to be splendid after the somewhat brackish water they had had on the "Albatross" during the latter part of the voyage.

It was not such a difficult matter as Hal had fancied, this setting up of a camp and, when the centre poles had been fixed and the ropes made taut, everything was finished save, of course, the stacking of stores, which went on uninterruptedly as the boats came and went between the yacht and the shore.

When the work was stopped the bos'n arranged that as soon as it became time to turn in a guard should be set.

Sporting rifles had been brought, and, armed with one of these, one of the crew

commenced his period of duty about the camp, keeping a careful eye on tents and stores alike, for no one was yet to know how many people there were on this mystery isle. Then the party, their work well on the way to completion, turned in, and silence fell upon the camp.

Hal was deep in dreams of finding great treasure hidden in broad sands when he felt a tap on his shoulder and, looking up, discovered that the bos'n was shaking him.

"It's your time for guard, Hal," he said. "Come, get a move on, laddie."

Hal rubbed the sleep from his eyes and sprang from the mattress on which he had been lying in a partly dressed condition. He had soon put on his coat and was accompanying the bos'n to the entrance to the camp.

Old Bill was carrying a lantern, and in the rays it cast Hal could see the stiff figure of the sentry in the distance.

"Halt! Who goes there?" he cried as they approached, and when the bos'n had said "Albatross" they approached the guard, and he handed his gun over to Hal and hurried back for his well-earned rest.

"Keep a sharp look-out, Hal," said old Bill, "and take this pocket light. There is a

watch on the yacht and, if anything out of the ordinary happens, just signal him with two flashes, and they will send a boat at once.

"Now be on your guard the whole time, and keep your eyes ever watching as we are not sure yet if there are inhabitants on the island apart from the girl who has already been seen."

Bill held out his hand and, having gripped Hal's, departed with a kindly "Good night."

At first Hal felt very strange. The darkness was so intense and it was an uncanny experience to be standing looking out over the sandy bay and out to sea in the knowledge that every one else was asleep.

Once or twice he fancied that he heard a sound, but he put it down to the wind moving the palms in the distance, and took no further notice.

Hal's was the last watch, and a careful one it was. He listened and looked, having now become more accustomed to the darkness.

Hal had just decided that keeping watch on an almost uninhabited island was a most uneventful business when, above the soft noise that the sea made as it rolled up the sands, came a distinct cry like the cry of a bird, but

Hal, who had heard many bird imitations, knew this to be no real bird's cry.

He looked keenly towards the direction from which the sound had come, and noticed that in the distance a large palm-tree was swaying to and fro, and then there came from the spot the unmistakable sound of a song. It was a strange and yet a musical song, sung in a foreign language, and Hal, feeling the touch of adventure, stole down to the sands and commenced to walk in the direction of the palms on the bluff across the bay.

He had just come to the middle of the bay, his gun held ready, his eyes keenly on the alert, when he became conscious that on the sands were other footmarks than his own.

He bent down, and there, plainly imprinted in the sand, were the marks of some very small and bare feet.

Carefully he followed the trail of the foot-steps, and just as he reached the foot of the bluff he noticed a most extraordinary thing. The fairly large palms towered above him, and they seemed to be joined by fibres half-way, and above the fibres there appeared to be something that, in the half light, looked very much like a house. Hal's attention was suddenly withdrawn by a sight that made

him look with amazement. From the top of the palm-trees came a loud cry, and the next minute he saw a figure, the figure of a girl, swarming down the tree.

"Hi! don't be frightened," he cried; "I am not going to hurt you." But the girl took no notice; she was as agile as a monkey, and was getting to the ground like a flash of light. When Hal reached the foot of the tree from which she had descended, there was no sign of her.

He ran forward, but she had gone, and at last, his search fruitless, he came back to the camp.

It was almost daylight now, and over the sea a red glow was showing, denoting the approach of sunrise. Hal watched it, fascinated, until something else caught his attention. A large snake that, over the big tent in which the bos'n was sleeping, was curling its head down in an angry fashion as though meaning to pay back anyone who dared to come to this sacred spot.

With frightened eyes Hal saw the head reach the flap of the tent, and then he awoke to the fact that something must be done, and done quickly. Without another moment's hesitation Hal raised his gun to his shoulder

and, carefully sighting the head of the snake, fired.

The force of the explosion from the heavy sporting piece drove him backward, but Hal didn't mind that, for the snake was lying on the ground and a surprised bos'n was standing looking at the fallen object.

"Why, what happened, Hal, lad?" he asked quickly. "I heard a shot." Then he realized and ran forward and gripped Hal's hand.

"That was a very dangerous snake, Hal," he exclaimed. "And you fired just in time."

Hal laughed now that the excitement was over, and blushed as the bos'n congratulated him.

Then he looked serious.

"Bos'n," he said quietly. "I have discovered something on this island that will surprise you."

Old Bill looked interested. "What is it, lad?" he asked.

"A house!" was Hal's reply.

CHAPTER VI

THE BAY OF SHELLS

BOS'N BILL laughed heartily, and then indicated the vast expanse of sea and the tangled undergrowth about them.

" You would hardly expect to find a house in a deserted spot such as this, would you, Hal ? " he said. " Are you sure you haven't been dreaming, lad ? "

A smile settled on the old sailor's face and he looked keenly at Hal.

" I have it," he continued. " You were sleeping on your watch. Shiver me, but this is a shooting matter."

Hal coloured up and then gave an exclamation and pointed down the stretch of sandy beach. There, dancing in the sunlight, clad in a rough dress of sacking, her hair flowing in the slight breeze, and trailing behind her a luxuriant piece of green seaweed, was the figure of a little girl. She seemed quite unconscious of anything save that she was alone with all the loveliness of the sea and the land

about her. They could hear her glad cries, and Hal was just about to run down towards the beach when the bos'n's hand on the boy's arm stayed him.

"She's just a little wisp of nature," he said. "Don't frighten her, Hal. I believe your story now. She must have built that house you speak of. Where was it?"

"You'll never guess, bos'n," said Hal, seeing now that the old salt was thoroughly interested. "I have a good mind not to tell you, though, as you said I was asleep and the whole thing was a dream."

"You have me there, Hal, lad," replied old Bill. "But come, where does the little lady live? We must get Nan to pay her an afternoon call and help her to make a new frock; that one looks rather damaged."

Hal laughed at the whimsical old man, and then indicated the other sand bluff across the bay.

"It's just over there, bos'n," he said, "to the left of where I am indicating, and she has built her house in two large palm-trees. I would just love to see what it is like inside."

"Ahoy, there, ahoy!" came a call from the sea and, turning, Hal and the bos'n saw a boat coming ashore. Above the gunwale

appeared the laughing faces of Nan and Dick.

"Why, here we are," cried the bos'n.
"Here is the whole bag of tricks."

Hal rushed down to the beach, followed by the bos'n, and soon they were hauling the boat up the gleaming sands.

"Have you had any adventures, Hal?" cried Nan as she leapt ashore. "Is there anyone else on the island apart from the girl we saw?"

"I don't know, Nan," said Hal, "but the girl we saw has a wonderful house in the trees, and the bos'n and I have just seen her dancing to her shadow on the sands, haven't we, bos'n?" he said, turning to old Bill.

"Aye, that we have, Nan," said the old sailor. "She was teaching her shadow to waltz, I will swear to that."

Nan and the boys hurried off to the camp, and a little later the party was joined by Mr. Creed. He had no sooner come up to the camp than he told the bos'n that he thought the first thing they ought to do now that they had really arrived at the wonderful island that had once seemed so far off, was to have a thorough tour of inspection.

"I propose," said Mr. Creed, "that we

split up into two parties so that we can pretty well go over the whole island in the day. The bos'n and I will pick sides, as it were, and those we choose come with us."

The bos'n drew a bright shilling out of his pocket and spun it in the air.

"Heads," said Mr. Creed. And heads it was, so Mr. Creed looked around. His eyes fell on Hal. "I will have Hal," he said. "Now it is your turn, bos'n."

Bill chose Dick and Mr. Creed chose Nan, and then the sailors who had come ashore were chosen in turn, until, with one man left to look after the camp, the parties said good-bye and set off, each in a different direction.

Mr. Creed and his group went to the north of the island, and the bos'n and his party to the south, and soon they could no longer hear the parting "halloes" of one another.

Leaving the bay behind them, Mr. Creed Nan, and Hal, with their sailors, picked their way around the coast for some time, and they would have changed their direction and gone inland, but Mr. Creed suddenly became conscious of a curious sight.

They had come to another of those sand bluffs that seemed so plentiful on the island, and they were overlooking a little bay when

Mr. Creed pointed to a most extraordinary sight.

"Look, Hal," he said; "see how strange the reflection of the sun looks on the sands. They change colour. Isn't it beautiful? Let us go down and explore."

They hurried down the bluff's side and then, when they reached the sands, they discovered what it was. Dotted all about the sands were piles of lovely shells; these shells were all colours of the rainbow, and when the sun shone on the beach it looked more like a glorious cloud than anything else.

"Why!" said Hal suddenly, "that is why they call it the Isle of Shells, guardy. There cannot be any other reason."

"That's right," said Mr. Creed. "The old adventurer who left the map must have been struck by the very same thing that has attracted us, and he named the island from these curious shells. I have never seen such shells anywhere else in the world, and I have travelled a good deal."

They moved away from the beach, and with numerous slips scaled the sandhills that protected the vegetation from the touch of the sea.

Mr. Creed was climbing one of these hills

when a nicely timed push from Hal sent him rolling to the bottom in a cloud of sand. It was as much as Hal could do after that to walk along, the sight of Mr. Creed rolling down the slope had so tickled him.

"You young rascal," laughed Mr. Creed, "I will have my own back on you for that," and have it he did a few minutes later when Hal paused underneath a venerable-looking tree about which extraordinary creepers had grown. These creepers were strong and rope-like, and Mr. Creed, catching at the ends of some of them, wound them so effectively about Hal and the trunk of the tree that poor Hal was quite imprisoned.

"Now then," said Mr. Creed; "beg for mercy, and you shall be set free. Otherwise, Hal, we will leave you here as guest for the monkey family, who no doubt infest this part of the island."

Hal was at last persuaded to go down on his knees and beg for mercy, after which little ceremony he was set free, and the party continued on its voyage of discovery.

They had gone some little way when Hal became conscious of a dull, rumbling noise, and it was an unnerving sound. They had been following the course of the pretty river

that wound its way through rocks of a red and curious stone that Mr. Creed decided must be lava or volcanic rock. Near the stream the trees hung over the water, and Mr. Creed found that the water was perfectly pure.

The rumbling sound increased in violence, and Hal drew his guardian's attention to it.

"What can it be?" he said. "Do you think it is an earthquake, guardian?"

Mr. Creed was just about to speak when they came to an opening in the trees and the river widened out to show a great yawning rock chasm, and down into an immense well-like hole this river was pouring, making a most terrific noise as it shot over the side and disappeared in the black depths of the hole.

Hal's breath stopped short at the wonder of this scene. He had seen falls, but never a sight like this, and even Mr. Creed was amazed.

"There is an underground river here," he said. "This stream evidently finds its source in the mountain peak that you can see in the centre of the island, and some volcanic disturbance has caused this hole into which it now flows, leaving only that tiny stream

we followed to flow by a roundabout route to the sea. You can see the river branches off higher up—the larger stream rushing to this hole, the narrower stream working round the rock chasm."

They got as near as they could to the hole and looked below to see the frothing waters, but the sight was really so terrifying that even the sailors drew back.

"We shan't find the treasure down there, anyway," said Mr. Creed, as the party went on. "By the way, Hal," he said, turning to his ward, "to-morrow we are going into the question, and there will be a thorough examination of the map, and the search will start. The first thing to do, so I thought, was to get a perfect understanding of the island before we commenced our operations."

"It will be interesting, looking at the map after our trip," replied Hal. "As we shall recognize some of the places that the old adventurer indicated."

They had left the river now and were forcing their way through the undergrowth that barred their way through a veritable forest of trees. Once or twice they had paused, stayed in their march by the sight or the song of some strange bird. There

were parrots of a most unusual hue in the trees, and their chattering sounded quite noisy in the silence of this island forest.

"Look, look guardian!" said Hal suddenly, pointing to something white that flickered in the near distance. It seemed like something human, for first it would be concealed behind a tree, then it would dart to another, and then like a flash it was away in the branches of a giant monster. They could hear a wild chattering, and the next minute little twigs of the trees rained about them, and the chattering became more violent.

Mr. Creed laughed so hard that the tears flowed down his face.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it is a monkey Hal, a monkey, and it evidently thinks we are some new type of ape, for it is throwing things at us in a most vicious manner."

Very dramatically Mr. Creed's laughing stopped, for a rather larger twig than usual had knocked his hat clean off, and Mr. Creed, surprised by the happening, had stumbled and fallen, much to the amusement of the others, and no doubt the monkey, who started to cry like a human being and threw more sticks at the fallen Mr. Creed.

"I shall summon that fellow for assault,"

said Mr. Creed, as he scrambled to his feet. His threat was apparently quite idle, for the next moment another twig struck Mr. Creed, and yet another, until with such force and in ever-increasing size came these pieces of wood that the party had to take cover.

They could see the monkey now; it was in one of the highest branches of the tree, and its fur gleamed silvery white against the green, as a shaft of sunlight, which had pierced its way through the trees, fell upon it.

Nan was quite frightened, but Hal's hand comforted her as he slipped his arm about her shoulder and carefully loaded his gun.

"I think we will give this unwelcome visitor a fright," he said to Mr. Creed, and, raising his rifle, he levelled it at a spot quite away from the monkey and fired. The echoes of his shot went reverberating through the forest, but it had its effect, for, with a shrill scream, the monkey bounded away from tree to tree, until it was lost in the gloom of the distant trees.

Nan breathed again, and even Mr. Creed was relieved when they had seen the last of this curious fellow who had seemed so determined to stop the party's progress.

"That was a clever idea of yours, Hal," said Nan, and she looked at him with a glance of admiration—a compliment coming from Nan who was as tomboyish as either Dick or Hal.

Now that the party had been rid of the monkey by Hal's fortunate shot, it hurried on its way.

They were passing down an aisle of gigantic pine-trees when a shout from one of the sailors, Weston by name, called Mr. Creed and his charges to a little kind of clearing in the forest. The trees towered all around it, and yet the space was radiant with sunshine and the grass was green and luxuriant.

It was not the sunlight, though, nor the verdant vegetation that had made Weston pause, for, as they looked into the clearing, a gasp came from Mr. Creed's lips, and Hal's eyes were alight with interest.

"A Spanish camp!" said Mr. Creed. "Look, Hal, at those old leather saddles."

Mr. Creed stepped into the glade, and as he did so there came a sharp metallic ring. Bending down he felt amidst the grass and withdrew his hand—it was holding an old Spanish sword, very much like the one that Skipper Irving had left to Hal.

"If this place could only tell its history," said Hal.

"It does in a way," replied Mr. Creed. "There is every evidence of a hurry to get away. Look at those empty boxes and those flagons and equipment beside them. They were Spaniards, Hal, and I should say that they were taken by surprise and made off to their galleon. Perhaps it was the one in the sand. No doubt they put to sea in a storm, fearing something, and the tempest drove them back to disaster."

"We will come again, and collect the most interesting of the things for mementoes of our visit to the island. Let us get on now, there may be other adventures ahead."

Little did Mr. Creed know then that there were adventures ahead, one of which was to be startling indeed.

At last they left the forest behind them, and just as they came out into a large clearing—a clearing that was fringed with trees on the right and left sides, but gave a clear vision right in front—a cheerful bark fell upon their ears, and the next moment Peter appeared from the trees and raced up to his mistress.

Dick, as a special privilege, had been

allowed to take Peter with him, but evidently the terrier had pined for its mistress, and had broken away from the other party to find her.

Peter ran up to Nan, and Nan was just bending down to pat the excited dog when Hal sprang forward and caught at the terrier's collar.

"Look, Nan," he cried, "Peter did not run away—he came as a messenger. See, a note—a note on Peter's collar!"

With quick hands they undid the collar and drew off the note that had been affixed to it by a piece of string. Mr. Creed, who had come up, nervously watched Hal as he spread the note out. The words on it were few, but they evidently meant a lot.

"Come at once. Help needed," said the missive, and it was signed, "Bos'n."

Mr. Creed looked up from the missive, and there was a worried look on his face. Both Nan and Hal could see that even Peter seemed to realize that here, indeed, was bad news.

"The bos'n must have been in great difficulties to send for help," said Mr. Creed, after careful thought. "I have known him for many years now, and the bos'n is the

last person in the world to send for us unless there is real need for our assistance."

"What will you do, guardian?" asked Hal, looking up into Mr. Creed's face.

"There is only one thing *to do*," replied Mr. Creed. "That is to trust to Peter here to guide us to where the bos'n and Dick and the rest of the party are. Hi! Bolters, Waters, Weston," called Mr. Creed. "We are turning at once—a mishap to the others."

The three seamen who had formed part of the party that had set out with Hal and Nan came running back with surprised faces, and as they looked at the note that Peter had brought they exchanged meaning glances.

"It's a mystery, that's what it is—a mystery," said Weston. "I wonder if this island is really inhabited, and they have come up against some of the original inhabitants, who are showing fight?"

They turned now, and were hurrying back with Peter leading them.

"I should hardly fancy that was it," said Waters. "Otherwise we should have known before now. What do you say, Bolters?"

Bolters simply grunted and hurried along the way by which they had come. He was a very taciturn seaman, and it had been the

talk of the yacht that he never smiled, and either grunted or said "Yes" or "No."

"Bolters is quite chatty to-day, isn't he?" put in Weston. "One day, Bolters, they'll have you in Parliament, you mark my words."

Despite the seeming gravity of the bos'n's position it was as much as Hal could do to keep a straight face, and Nan was laughing, too. Somehow there was something so very, very sad about Bolters that you had to laugh, and at the present moment his face was as downcast as that of a whipped boy.

"Penny for your thoughts, Mr. Bolters," said Nan brightly. "I would love to know what you were thinking of."

"Would you, miss?" he said, still very mournfully. "Well, I was thinking of a dream I had last night."

"A dream—what kind of a dream?" asked Nan.

"It was a dream about food," said the seaman slowly. "You see, it was like this: I was thinking all about this place, and when I went to sleep I dreamt as how I was alone on an island, and most awfully hungry. When suddenly there came a terrific noise, and a lot of savages appeared, and they had a lot of food with them. Then I woke up."

"Yes, miss," put in Waters. "He was trying to eat the sole of his boot. I saw you, didn't I, Rupert?"

The now thoroughly silenced Bolters made no remark to this witticism, but just plodded on, and after a while the chatting ceased, for all of the party were intent on getting to where the bos'n was awaiting help.

To Hal the levity seemed unnatural, as he could not help but feel that there was danger ahead, and that perhaps his brother was at present in an extremely difficult position.

They had come to the end of the little river, and were hurrying above the sandhills. They came to the camp, and told the guard of the message, and asked him if he had heard or seen anything that could account for the bos'n's action.

The guard shook his head. "There has been nothing happening here, sir," he said to Mr. Creed, "save a signal or so from the yacht, otherwise I should have noticed it."

With instructions to tell the captain what had happened, and to prepare the medicine chest and food in case of emergencies, Mr. Creed hurried on.

Peter was barking occasionally, and running

on ahead as though to suggest that they went faster.

"Look at Peter," said Nan. "Isn't he really a wonderful dog? He knows all the time what is happening."

Mr. Creed smiled at Nan. "Somehow," he said, "I feel that we are nearing the bos'n, as Peter's whole attitude suggests it."

Peter was barking quite vigorously now, and running so fast ahead that Hal had to hasten to keep him in view. They could see him chasing through the trees and past a clearing that led to the foot of a rocky-looking hill. This hill was formed almost entirely of volcanic rock, and in parts was very steep. The idea came to Hal that perhaps someone had tried to climb, and had been injured in the attempt; but he dismissed the idea, for he realized that one of the party would have been to the camp by now had that been so.

It was at the foot of this rock-hill that the party at last came across Peter. Peter was barking as though his life depended upon it, and he was looking with such imploring eyes at Mr. Creed that he realized that this must be the end of their journey.

"You, Weston and Bolters, hurry to the

other side of the rock," said Mr. Creed, " and Hal and Waters and Nan and myself will search here."

The men ran away, and Mr. Creed bade his three helpers look about them for any sign of the party.

Search as they might, though, nothing came to light, and Mr. Creed would have decided that they had mistaken the spot had Peter not been so insistent. He refused to leave the place, and barked furiously and now almost indignantly.

It was then that there came to the ears of the searchers a faint, a very faint, sound as though someone was scraping ; and sensing the direction from which the sound came, Peter leapt rather than ran forward, and began scraping at a part of some loose rock with his forepaws.

Mr. Creed called out to Weston and Bolters, and then beckoning Hal, who was exploring higher up, went to the spot where Peter was so energetically digging.

" Hal," said Mr. Creed, " send Nan down to the camp for some shovels. They must have found a cave, and the place has fallen in."

Nan was not a moment listening to her

instructions before she was flying as fast as her long legs could carry her down to the camp, whilst with their hands Hal and Mr. Creed and the sailors began to scrape away the rubble at the foot of the rock.

They could see now that this was newly fallen, and they saw something else—Peter had disappeared. Look as they might they could not find him, and it was not until Hal's keen eyes saw the little head peering through a hole that Mr. Creed's attention was drawn to a very small fissure in the rock from which Peter was emerging—and he carried a note in his mouth.

“We're in here. A sudden fall of loose earth buried the entrance to what must be a cave. We are all safe at present; but I fear a second fall of rock. So urgency is necessary.”

The note was signed by the bos'n.

Mr. Creed scribbled a cheering message and sent Peter back with it, and then, with the arrival of the rescue party with the shovels, all began to dig as hard as they could.

As the time went on Mr. Creed fancied that

the bos'n and his party would never be got out, but at last a pick went through the last layer of rock and the rescuers were rewarded by a vigorous cheer.

It did not take long to enlarge the hole, and at last Dick appeared, and two pairs of strong arms drew him into the safety of the open air.

The hole had to be made a trifle larger for the bos'n, but finally he was rescued, and it was then that he told Mr. Creed how it had all happened.

"We came up from the camp, and were attracted to the house in the trees."

"The island girl's house?" asked Hal quickly.

"Yes, Hal," replied the bos'n; and then, turning to Mr. Creed: "We pushed on then, going through the undergrowth, when out of a copse dashed the girl herself, and although we cried out, in as many languages as we knew, that we were friends, she ran off as though fiends were on her track. We followed, and as we fancied that she had gone in a very large fissure of the rock we entered, and then there came a terrific crash, and the opening was closed as though some gigantic door had been suddenly slammed on us. I

was at a loss to know what to do, when suddenly I saw a beam of light in the distance, and I discovered that it came from a very tiny fissure that no doubt supplied the air that kept fresh in the cavern. It was through this opening that I sent Peter—and here we are."

"If it hadn't been for that opening I don't know how we should ever have found you," said Mr. Creed. "We owe a debt of gratitude to Peter here."

"Do you hear that, Peter?" cried Nan, as she bent down and wound her arms about the dog's neck. For answer Peter turned and licked her face in a most affectionate manner; but he didn't understand why all eyes were centred so kindly on him.

CHAPTER VII

THE ISLAND-GIRL

THE tour of exploration that had ended in such a dramatic way was the talk of the camp that day, and it was decided that as soon as all the stores were landed a real trip of discovery should be made.

“Really,” said the bos’n, “we should start preparing a proper head-quarters here. The weather in these parts is very curious, and there is never any warning of a really terrible storm. I have seen some terrific electrical storms in these seas, and I think we ought to have something more stable than just these tents.”

“What do you mean, bos’n?” asked Mr. Creed.

“What I suggest,” said Bill, “is that here and to-day we take over this island in the name of our gracious King; and as its position is extremely useful—just off the South American coast—we raise the old flag of Britain over it; and, more than that, Mr.

Creed, commence to put it in a good state of civilization."

The boys' eyes were shining. "Not build trenches and forts, and that kind of thing," said Dick at once.

The bos'n laughed. "We don't exactly expect to be invaded, Dick," he replied. "What I mean is, that we ought to set to work to build some houses—wooden houses—here. We shall want better shelter than this soon; and there is never any harm done in leaving some habitable spot for, say, some poor castaway who is driven ashore in a storm."

"We'll call it 'Treasure Town,'" said Nan with shining eyes. "There shall be the official head-quarters, the government offices, to be used by Mr. Creed and yourself, bos'n, and perhaps we might make a park."

"Well," said Bill laughingly, "I don't quite contemplate electric trams and trains and anything of that sort yet; but if we set to work to-day to fell some trees, and to make a fairly good-sized general cabin, it will be a start."

It was after lunch that the first work was commenced. Working parties were formed under the most expert of the crew, and orders

were given by the bos'n to start felling trees.

One tree in particular had been singled out as being very useful for a flagstaff, and this was hewn down, and the whole party were present when it was borne to the highest point of the island near the shore, and erected. The yacht's carpenter had smoothed it with care, and it was made firm by supporting baulks of wood. When at last it towered above them, Weston—who was a splendid climber—took the flag that Mr. Creed handed him, and swarmed above. In his pocket was some cord, and soon he was fixing the flag to the summit of the tree, fastening it firmly.

As it fluttered out on the breeze a burst of cheering sounded out below, and Mr. Creed solemnly said :

“ In the name of Great Britain, I declare this island an imperial possession.”

When the whole party had finished cheering a move was made back to the camp, and under the direction of the bos'n gangs were organized for felling trees and doing all the preliminary work prior to commencing the building of “ Treasure Town.”

It was difficult to find Nan any work to do, as tree-felling was a trifle too arduous for

her, so Mr. Creed suggested that she should go out in search of a good spot for fibre, as they would want rope eventually. He warned her not to go out of sight of the camp, and when he had turned in order to chat to the bos'n Nan bade a hurried farewell to Hal and Dick, and then ran down the beach, and was lost to view a few moments later in the towering palms that grew so near the fringe of the sands.

Nan was quite a distance from the camp when she remembered Mr. Creed's advice, and pausing, she looked about her, but she could not see the camp ; so in order to keep in close touch with the head-quarters of the little expedition she hurried back ; but now, so surrounded by palm-tree fronds and giant cacti was she, that wherever she went she seemed always to come back to the spot she had originally left. Then Nan discovered that she had been going round and round in a circle.

It was not so light now, and Nan, fearing that she would be forced to spend the night in this wilderness of tropical plants, cried out at the top of her voice, but no reply came save the uncanny echo of her own voice that mocked her.

Her fears were doubled now, and to her mind came visions of animals in this wild place, and, worse, savages, for Nan did not know—as now the bos'n was convinced—that there was only one other person on the island.

Suddenly from the distance came the sound of singing, and the next thing that happened was that a rare-plumaged bird rose above the spot where Nan was, and then fell to the ground with an arrow in its wing. With a cry of pity Nan rushed to the bird, and plucked the arrow out of the wing. It was only a slight wound, she saw with delight, and there and then she determined that when help came she would care for this lovely object and make a pet of it. Her thoughts were rudely disturbed. Behind her she heard a cry of rage, and turning, found herself face to face with the strangest girl it had ever been Nan's lot to see.

Nan's amazement knew no bounds. Facing her, with eyes that showed their defiance, was a girl of about Nan's own age. Her hair was jet black, and her complexion was bronzed with a healthy red colour showing through it. The stranger's eyes were blue, and she was lithe and looked strong.

It was not these things, however, that attracted Nan so much as the girl's dress. About the little form was wound an old piece of sacking that was torn in places, and kept together by strong cord. The foot of the sack had evidently been cut away just at the base, and hung back like a monk's cowl.

Nan could not help but think how very pretty the new-comer was, and she also wanted to laugh a little at the child's strange dress.

For a moment neither spoke, but at last Nan took her courage in both hands, and approached the maid of the island and looked reproachfully at her.

"It was cruel, very cruel, of you to shoot at this bird," she said, softly, smoothing the lovely wings of the poor creature as she spoke.

The girl looked surprised, and then bared her teeth and laughed, and began to chatter in a strange tongue. Nan flushed to the roots of her hair, but tried to conceal her awkwardness, and spoke again.

"Perhaps you do not speak English," she said. Still the girl laughed, and all the anger had died out of her eyes now. It seemed that the words that Nan had spoken, although

they had not been understood, had helped to bridge the gap between the two.

Laughing as she came, the girl of the island approached Nan, and her brown fingers caught at Nan's blouse, and touched her hair as though to see if both were real or not. The look of Nan apparently amused her just as her own appearance had made Nan laugh inwardly; but it was Nan's shoes that the girl took such a fancy to. She bent down, and with her face almost to the ground looked carefully at them and touched them, talking to herself as she did so.

It then struck Nan that it would be as well to let this strange creature know that she was lost on the island; and as words were out of the question she decided that the best thing to do would be to convey her meaning by actions.

Nan had been rather good at games, and acting the meaning of words was one of her strong points. She therefore gave a description of being lost, running to either side of the clearing, and then coming back into the centre and pointing to herself and shaking her head.

The girl understood, for she laughed, and took hold of Nan's arm and drew her towards

an opening in the vegetation. In a few minutes the two were on a path, and hurrying along, Nan being led without offering any resistance. As a matter of fact there was something about this strange little girl that drew Nan to her. She seemed so trusting, and yet so very alert as though prepared for any emergency. As she walked along she looked keenly to either side of her ; and once she drew Nan back just in time to save her from slipping into a hole along the path. When they had passed by it, the girl paused and removed the bramble that had concealed it, to show a carefully laid trap for some unwary animal.

The girl then laughed and pointed to her mouth, and Nan knew that she meant that it was in this way and with her bow and arrow that she got her food on the island.

How far they went Nan could not tell. They seemed to twist and turn in an amazing manner, and yet her guide knew quite well the way they were going, for at last they left the vegetation, and Nan was surprised to see herself below two giant palms, and, looking above, she saw a house amid the trees.

It was the house of which Hal had spoken. Nan's eyes sparkled, and she looked at the

island-girl to see what would happen next. The girl was laughing and pointing above. Next she caught hold of a fibre that looked as though it was growing from the palm, and, swinging herself on to it, began to scramble above.

The house, so Nan could see, was constructed of baulks of timber over which plaited grasses had been carefully placed so that the rain could not penetrate. Large fibres bound the lower baulks to the palms, and just in front of the house, to be plainly seen from below, but concealed at a distance by the palm-fronds, was a platform upon which the girl now stood, and indicated the rope to Nan, as though suggesting that her new-found friend should come above in the same manner as she herself had climbed.

Nothing daunted, Nan caught at the fibre, and soon she was swarming above, swinging to and fro as she mounted upwards. The other girl held out her hand as she reached the platform and drew her into the strangest room Nan had ever seen in her life.

The floor was made of boards—rough, obviously sea-tossed, boards—upon which dried grasses were laid. The house was

thatched Nan could see now, and into the grass-thatching pieces of wood had been stuck, and these served as pegs. Hanging on to one of these pegs was an old piece of sailcloth, and on another was a bird that looked ready for eating. There were skins of all kinds lying about, and in one corner a heap of them.

Nan made an action as of sleeping, and pointed to the skins. The girl nodded and smiled. Then she showed Nan a stock of flint-headed arrows and a strange medley of self-made fish-hooks and lines. Nan could see that the place had been constructed from things thrown up by the sea and things found on the island, for here was an old Spanish helmet full of water, and Nan could see that it was used as a bucket for drinking water. Even as the thought came to her the girl picked it up, and, having first drunk, offered it to Nan to do likewise. Nan shook her head, but nevertheless she appreciated the offer, and realized that the intentions of the girl of the island were kind ones.

There were some most wonderful things in this strange house. Curious shells and many-hued feathers from birds that the girl had no doubt caught or found on the island. But

it was something lying in the corner that gave Nan a start.

Evidently it was something that the girl of the island prized greatly, for she ran to the corner and picked it up gleefully, polishing it and laughing. Then Nan knew that her eyes had not deceived her, for what the girl was holding was an ingot, or brick, of solid gold!

“Was this a clue to the treasure?” thought Nan.

As she held the wonderful object in her hands Nan had a vision of what the whole of the treasure must be like. “After all,” she decided in her mind, “the treasure was here somewhere, and perhaps this strange girl could lead the party to it one day—one day when she were more friendly with them, and understood that the party would do her no harm.

The ingot was very heavy—very heavy and of great value, as Nan felt sure. She could see how the island-girl’s eyes glistened as Nan looked at it, and felt that this quaint outcast also realized that here was treasure, and something to be prized greatly.

Nan simply loved being in this curious place, and, tired out by her exertions in trying to find a way from the clearing in which she

had been lost, she flung herself down on the skins, and watched the strange island-girl.

The girl sat down beside her, and showed her shell after shell, speaking in her strange language as she did so, and looking—oh, so confidently—into Nan's eyes that Nan's heart was won completely over.

"If only you could speak English," said Nan with a laugh, and she laughed more as she saw the puzzled look that came to the other's face.

Little did Nan realize how late it was getting, and that already they must be wondering why she had not returned to the camp. Tired as she was, she soon felt her eyes becoming heavy, and then the inevitable happened—Nan went to sleep.

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The work on the building of the first hut for the new camp was in full swing. Dick and Hal, with their sleeves rolled up and their coats off, were busily engaged in carting timber under the bos'n's instructions, and one of the boats was busily going to and fro, bringing such things as were needed by the head carpenter, who had the business in hand, and was acting under old Bill's orders.

"Come on, me bully boys," cried the bos'n. "We'll soon have 'Treasure Town' built at this rate." Already four large posts had been placed at the four corners of the hut and hammers were busily at work nailing planks to the sides.

Weston and Bolters were digging a trench around the hut, and everything was going in a most magnificent way as Mr. Creed declared when he came to examine the work.

"Really, bos'n," he said, "Hal and Dick will be twice as useful when we get back to old England. There will be no need for them to live in other people's houses—they can build their own."

Just then Bolters came up to the bos'n, and, having touched his forelock, looked awkward, and then said :

"Me and Weston have been having a bit of an argument, sir."

"Oh, have you?" said the old salt. "And what might it have been about, Bolters?"

"Well, sir," said Bolters, "he told me that if I went to the top of the bluff yonder, and put me finger through the telescope, I should see Glasgow." He paused. "Of course I told him he was wrong, sir."

"Why do you think he is wrong, Bolters?" asked Hal, who was laughing now. "Perhaps he's right."

"No, sir, he can't be," said Bolters. "How could I see Glasgow from here? No one could."

"That's where you're wrong, Bolters," put in Dick. "Chips, the carpenter, was trying to fix one of the baulks of timber just now, and he put it through the window. We all saw glass go, didn't we, Hal?"

"Rather!" replied his brother. "And if I were you, Bolters, I would think out some way in which you can catch Weston, as he is evidently joking with you."

Still mystified, the profound Bolters went back to his work, seeking in his mind for some trick that he might play on his shipmate. Suddenly he looked up and a bright light shone in his eye. Taking off his cap, he started to run towards Weston, who was busily digging the trench. "It's all over the island," he cried. "It's all over the island."

Weston looked up. "What, man?" he cried. "What's all over the island?"

"The sky," said Bolters very quietly, and, picking up his spade, steadily settled down to work.

These two incidents had quite driven all thought of Nan out of the bos'n's mind, but suddenly he realized that she was not only out of sight but long overdue.

"Hal!" cried old Bill. "Have you seen Nan? She went off some time ago now. You don't know if she's back, do you?"

Hal shook his head. Neither did Dick know, and on all sides the reply to the bos'n's query was that she had not been seen for some time.

"I hope that no harm has come to her," said the bos'n, as he picked up his gun and hurried down to the beach. There was no sign of the truant on the sands, and even when the bos'n had mounted the bluff no reply came to his repeated calling.

He was getting nervous now for the girl's safety, and hurried on past palm and through the undergrowth calling out as he went, but only the echoes came back.

"That's strange," he thought. "I wonder what can have become of her. Nan!" he cried. "Nan!" But at last old Bill gave up calling, and plodded on, worried very much at this strange disappearance of Nan.

He was just about to turn back in order to get help from the camp when to his ears

came the sound of singing. The voice was that of a child, and he knew the language for a strange one.

The girl of the island, was his first thought, and he hurried towards the direction from which the sounds came. As he approached the two palm-trees he recognized them from Hal's description as being the rendezvous of the island-girl, and Bill, looking upwards, saw, sitting on the platform in front of the tree-house, the girl in question—and she was smiling.

As Bill looked he noticed that she was indicating the house behind her, and without more ado he commenced to climb one of the palms, only to slip back, much to the amusement of the girl above, who cried with delight as she saw his struggles to reach her. Then Bill felt a long fibre touch his shoulder, and, catching it, he was soon swarming up the tree, and the next moment he entered the house.

An exclamation of surprise came to his lips, but he checked it as he felt a little hand on his arm, and turning, he saw that the island-girl's fingers were touching her lips.

In the corner of the tree-house room he saw Nan, and she was in a deep, sound sleep.

It was as much as the bos'n could do to restrain his laughter, but he did so, and then, moving over to Nan, tapped her lightly on the shoulder.

She opened her eyes, and with a hasty exclamation sprang to her feet. Nan realized where she was, and it was the sight of the bos'n that made her remember her promise.

"This means a day in the cells, young lady," laughed the bos'n. "If it hadn't been for your new-found friend we should all have been searching the island by now for you."

Nan looked gratefully towards the island-girl, and held out her hand, which the girl took ; and then with a smile Nan indicated the bos'n and herself, and pointed out to where their camp lay. It was an obvious suggestion that the girl should go with them ; but to Nan's surprise she shrank back against the grasses, and then, darting past them, stood on the platform for a moment, and the next was down the rope in lightning fashion.

"Well, that was a nice way to reply to an invitation, wasn't it ?" said old Bill as he scratched his head and looked to the ground. "Come, Nan," he continued. "She will be more tame now that you have made friends

with her. We must get back, or they will wonder what has happened."

When they had slid down the rope and were hurrying along the sands, the figure of a little girl stole from the shadow of some sweeping ferns, and quickly mounted the rope to her house in the tree-tops.

The day following on Nan's visit to the island-girl was as glorious as any of the party could have expected. The sun was intense, and yet there was a soft breeze playing across the island.

As Hal, Dick, and Nan looked out over the new land that was to be their home now for some time they could not help but marvel at the beauty of the colours of sea and sky and foliage. The high palm-trees that waved gently to and fro, the yellow sands, and the soft wavelets that seemed too tired to come far up the beach.

"I have it," said Hal suddenly. "Let us get the bos'n to allow we three to row round the island. Wouldn't that be great fun, Dick?"

Both Dick and Nan fell in with the idea at once, and on the bos'n being told of their plan he scratched his head for a moment, and looked severely at the little party.

"If you will all promise to take great care," he said, "I don't see any reason why you should not go. You will be in charge of the party, Hal, and you will be responsible."

"I will take great care, bos'n," said Hal. "You can trust me."

"Well, then, get off now," said the bos'n. "And mind you make a thorough exploration of everything around the coast."

"We might light on the treasure," said Nan excitedly, and then, dragging Hal by the arm, she hurried him down to where a boat was drawn up on the beach. It was a moment's work for the three to draw the light craft into the water, and when they had got it afloat Dick and Hal got out the oars and pulled off into the quiet waters.

"This is better than felling trees," said Dick, as he and Hal rowed away. "What do you say, Hal?"

Hal laughed. "There will be a lot of work like that before we are finished," he replied, "and, really, I rather like it. It is so new to be using your hands all day instead of trying to understand books and do sums—hateful things."

They rounded the bluff near which lay the island-girl's home, and Nan had to tell both

the boys how surprised she was when she saw the interior of the girl's tree-top house.

"Perhaps we shall come across her to-day," said Dick. "Wouldn't it be fun if she would be friends with us; she could take us to all the best spots on the island."

"I wonder how she got here in the first place," said Nan.

"She must have been shipwrecked," replied Hal, "and she has lived on the birds and fish here ever since. She must be a plucky girl. I wouldn't like to be alone on a deserted island, would you, Nan?"

Nan shook her head, and then, forgetting the subject, pointed out to Dick the wonderful red rocks that were coming into view now that the boat was turning her nose into a little lagoon around which these rocks rose high. They seemed almost a flame of colour with the sun on them, and Nan clapped her hands with delight. She was enjoying this voyage of discovery—there were other surprises than this wonderful rocky lagoon in store for the party.

They pulled into the lagoon and Hal proposed that they should go ashore and explore.

They got into the lagoon without difficulty,

and Hal, telling Dick to ship his oars, sprang lightly ashore as the boat grounded, then Dick followed, and they drew Nan and the boat high and dry.

It was a curious sight they saw as they approached the rocks. Out of the solid red stone flowed little streams of water and below the cliffs rock-basins had been formed by the water, and in these pools—some of them quite large ones—wonderful red plants were growing.

Hal and Nan gazed into these basins fascinated, and Dick, who had taken off his shoes and stockings and was sitting on the edge of a particularly large pool, was enjoying himself immensely.

Suddenly, however, he gave a cry, and quickly drew one of his feet out of the water ; and no wonder, for Hal, looking up, saw that a large crab had fixed itself on to Dick's foot.

“ Hi ! ” shouted Dick, “ that's my foot.” He kicked out and the crab went hurrying out to sea like an aeroplane in full flight.

After that Dick was more careful, and Nan couldn't help laughing at the way in which he examined the water before he paddled in it.

Besides crabs these basins contained most beautiful shells and seaweed of a pale pink

colour that looked very lovely as it floated to and fro below the surface of the water.

Hal, leaving Dick and Nan by the pools, walked towards the other end of the lagoon, and here it was that he discovered an opening in the cliff-side.

It was a cave. The opening was a large one, and the sands below Hal's feet were firm as he walked into it.

He had fancied that it did not go far in the rock, but judge of his surprise when he found a passage leading out of the cave—a broad passage, for he had his electric torch, and with this he peered ahead.

Hurrying back to the beach he called Dick and Nan, and their excitement knew no bounds when Hal told them of his find.

"Perhaps the passage is only a short one," said Dick. "It will be disappointing if there is nothing beyond."

"Let's hurry along and see," said Nan. And suiting the action to her words she ran into the cave, followed by the boys.

She was in the passage when Hal and Dick caught her up, and all three holding hands walked along together.

"This is the safer way," said Hal, "as you never know if we might not come across

a hole, and now if one fell the other two could serve as a protection."

"Look there," said Hal, as he flashed his light on the moist rock ceiling above them. "Isn't that funny, Dick?"

What he was pointing out were large crystals that had formed on the rock and hung above the little party's head like giant icicles.

The rock sides of the passage were damp, and there was a damp smell; it was also very cold—so cold that Nan shivered.

"Shall we go back?" asked Hal; but Nan wouldn't hear of it, so on they went again along this seemingly endless passage that lead whither they didn't know. The passage was narrower now, and curious to relate a faint breeze could be felt that made Hal fancy that they would find the open air at the end of the tunnel; but there was no light in the distance, and on and on they trudged until Hal was for giving up the search. Somehow, though, it seemed a pity to turn back when they had come so far, and he was encouraged to go on by an excited cry from Nan.

"The passage is wider," she said. "We are coming to the end, Hal!"

They almost ran now, and wider became the

tunnel, which ended abruptly at a turning and brought the three upon a sight that gave them more surprise than any other happening since their arrival on the island.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAVE OF THE INCAS

THEY had come into a cave whose interior was as large as a fair-sized church—and as high. More wonderful still, it was lit, and the light was sunshine that came into the cave from two deep holes on either side. These holes were almost as large in circumference as some parts of the passage through which the children had come ; but the two boys were at a loss to understand how they had been formed.

“ What an adventure ! ” Hal exclaimed. “ Who would have thought of finding a place like this ? ”

“ Look over there,” cried Nan, pointing to a part of the cave that was more in shadow than the rest.

It was a curious sight that Hal and Dick saw. Carved out of the solid rock, almost from the base of the cave to the rounded ceiling, were two large statues—the one that of a young girl, the other a boy of about Hal’s age.

The light through the two holes played strange tricks with these two great effigies, for as the light fell on their faces it seemed as though they smiled.

Behind the heads of the two there was a carved picture of the sun, and in their hands they held globes of gold.

Almost in awe the three came near to the great statues. All about the walls other things were carved, and in one part of the cave there were large, oblong cavities in the rock.

"Whatever people made these carvings," said Hal, "they slept in these places."

A closer view of the cavities showed that Hal was right, for quaint leather coverings and woolly blankets, that had kept a splendid state of preservation despite their evident age, lay in the quaint beds.

Nan had run excitedly to another spot in the cave, and Dick and Hal were surprised to see her bending over something on the ground.

"What have you found, Nan?" cried Hal, hurrying to where she was holding something in her hands—something that glittered like a star.

"It's a wonderful crown of some sort," said

Nan, looking up at last. "See, Hal, there are diamonds and rubies in it."

"Perhaps the treasure is here," said Dick.
"Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

Nan rose to her feet, and handed her "find" to Hal.

"It's evidently part of a treasure," he said.
"I shouldn't wonder if this is the crown of the ruler of the Incas whose treasure the old adventurer spoke of."

"Then," exclaimed Dick, "this cave must have been made by the Indians who came here with the treasure."

"Either made or found by them," said Hal.
"They formed it into a sacred place, no doubt, and those two statues are of their rulers who, as you know, Dick, were a boy and a girl."

"Yes," said Dick, "and the Spaniards under a soldier named Pesaro invaded their country, Peru, and tried to obtain their vast treasure."

Nan's discovery was the first of many, for Dick discovered some earthenware goblets; and in one part of the cave there were the remains of a meal, a curious leather shield was found also, and an ancient bow with a quiver filled with arrows lying near it.

It was after a thorough search had been

made, and when Hal thought of how much more of the island there was to explore, that the three hurried into the passage again, and after an eventful journey came again to the beach.

As they rowed out of the lagoon involuntarily the three looked back to where they could still see the cave-opening. Each of the three could picture the scene of those old days when the boats of the Peruvian Indians lay sheltered from storms in this bay of red rocks, and there were busy comings and goings from the great cave in which they had erected monuments to their two rulers who ruled only under the heel of the Spaniards.

“By Jove!” said Hal. “We must have been a time getting to that place, Dick. I feel as hungry as anything.”

Really the adventure of the three had taken much longer than they fancied, for, lost in the excitement of their discovery, the hours had flown by, and already it was afternoon.

Nan proposed a little rest from rowing, whilst they ate the sandwiches and drank the lemonade which the kindly bos’n had had put in the boat just before she was run out.

“I’m famished,” said Dick, with his mouth

full of bread, and Nan agreed with him as she took another sandwich.

Rowing came easier to the two afterwards ; but Hal decided that it was impossible to get right round the island, so he bade Nan steer more carefully, and then turned the boat's nose for home.

But whereas it had been an easy thing to row before, it was harder now. Angry looking clouds were hurrying into the sky, and from calm the sea had turned to a roughness that shook the boat considerably.

Hal looked anxious, and blamed himself for not having taken more careful note of the weather, but both he and Dick bent themselves to the work, and fought hard to get the boat home. At last Hal realized how great the danger was becoming.

“ We must take her ashore, Dick,” he cried, as an ominous rumble of thunder came to their ears, and the rain commenced to come slashing down.

They turned the boat, and as they did so the seas caught it and raced it full towards an inlet. All would have been well had not a cross current turned the frail craft over and precipitated the three into the water.

Blinded by the spray, Hal and Dick dragged

themselves up the sands, and looked about them for Nan.

She was in safe hands, for the island-girl from the vantage of a rock had seen the coming accident, and at that moment was dragging Nan from the sea towards the safety of the higher sands.

When Hal and Dick had got over their amazement at the sight of the strange girl standing over Nan in such a protecting fashion they ran down the sands to where she sat laughing and wringing out her sea-drenched stockings.

Some strange, fierce little words came from the island-girl's lips ; but a smile from Nan calmed all her fears, and as Hal and Dick came near her she bared her white teeth, and, looking down at Nan, laughed.

“ Friends,” said Nan, indicating the boys ; and she rose to her feet and held out her hand to each of them to indicate to the girl what she meant.

“ Pepita—Pepita,” said the island-girl, and she laid her hand in Hal’s to show her friendship.

“ Why, that must be her name,” said Dick. “ And it is a Spanish name.”

He had learnt a little of the language at

school, so he said, "Espana," which is Spanish for Spain. The island-girl nodded, and commenced to speak ; but, of course, she wasn't understood.

Somehow, now words weren't needed, for it seemed that the four understood one another.

Slipping her hand into Nan's, the island-girl drew her up the beach.

"I say," said Hal, "I believe she is going to show us some of the secrets of the island, Dick."

Closely the two followed, as Nan and her friend entered a limestone ravine, the sides of which were precipitous. Only a faint grey light came down from above, and the atmosphere of this place was damp—and as Hal said, "mysterious."

He ran ahead.

"I think we ought to be careful here, Nan," he said.

Nan laughed. "She must know where she is going, Hal." And Dick agreed. They continued for some way, and at last the ravine broadened out, to show in the distance a clump of fir-trees, and towards these trees the island-girl hurried.

As they came out into the full light it was

to see a sight that made Hal and Dick and Nan pause and hold their breath.

They stood on the brow of a high but gradually rising hill, and at the foot of the hill, made lovely in parts by numerous trees, was a wonderful inland lake. Under the high sunlight it seemed like a giant opal, for all the colours from the trees and vegetation near by were mirrored in its depths, and large red water-lilies—flowers that none save Pepita had seen before—floated to and fro as the soft tropic wind ruffled the waters.

Away in one corner of the lake, where the trees came nearer to the banks than in other parts, wild duck were swimming, and Dick could plainly see a heron and a stately flamingo, whose bearing seemed so fatherly to the other birds near by.

Then it was that Dick gave a cry of delight.

“A birch-bark canoe!” he cried, pointing to some grasses in the water below them from which pointed the prow of an Indian-type of canoe.

Pepita turned and laughed. It was evidently hers, and she understood the reason of Dick’s excitement, for, beckoning them, she raced down the hill-side followed by the three, but they could not outdistance her, and she

was at the water's edge some moments before them.

As Hal ran the thought came to him of the ship's boat that lay high and dry on the beach. It would be safe there, he told himself.

Dick and Nan were quite out of breath when they came to where Pepita was standing, and it was Hal who helped the island-girl to get the canoe out of the grasses.

At last they drew it to the water's edge, and Dick and Nan got in, followed by Hal ; then, lightly, Pepita leapt in after them, and soon her quickly plied paddle was making them flash through the water.

It was a large canoe, and Pepita's hands evidently constructed it, for she gesticulated as the boat hurried along, and the three took her meaning to be that she had made this out of a fallen tree. Nan thought there had never been anything half so wonderful as this lake, for it was as clear as crystal, and they could see fresh-water fish darting to and fro as they hurried across the stretch of water. To either side on the left and right of them, large limestone rocks reared themselves, and it was partly these wonderful rocks—of a red colour—that gave the lake such a glorious glow.

They reached the other side of the lake far too soon to please Nan ; but Pepita evidently had more surprises in store for them, for she indicated that they were to hurry out of the canoe, and when she had drawn it up the bank with their help, she ran on ahead down a little path between the trees—followed by the three now thoroughly interested friends.

“ Isn’t all this lovely ? ” said Nan. “ I wonder what new secrets and surprises are in store for us ? ”

Hal smiled.

“ She knows every inch of the island, I should say,” he responded, “ and we may come across a new wonder at any minute.”

Hal was right, for at the end of the path was a clearing, and built in this clearing—in the centre—was a large, circular fence made of young trees and joined by fibres that had rotted away now and hung in a forlorn way from the timber they had once held so tightly together.

“ A stockade ! Hal, it is a stockade ! ” cried Dick, and rushed forward followed fast by Hal. But Pepita was before them, and when they passed through the ramshackle gate that had once been a powerful defence, they stopped dead in amazement, for, from

the shelter of one of the huts within had come two fluffy, gambolling animals.

"Baby jaguars!" said Hal in surprise.
"Pepita's pets."

These animals were licking the island-girl's hands, and Pepita's eyes were dancing with delight, and she was crying strange Spanish things to the two great bundles of wool, as they seemed.

The pets seemed to resent the appearance of Nan and the others, but they were very obedient to Pepita's instructions and made friends when told to.

Hal and Dick left the two girls with the pets whilst they went off to explore the stockade, which, naturally, formed a big adventure for them.

Dick found a beam through which an arrow was stuck firmly, and the two decided that this place had been attacked—and attacked by the keepers of the Incas treasure, for there were other arrows, and in one of the tumble-down dwellings Hal found a complete set of Spanish armour and some pikes from which red tassels, tarnished and torn, still hung. There were some ancient cups of Spanish manufacture on the oaken table set in the centre of the room, a discarded sword lay

upon the floor, whilst near by it was a breast-plate through which an ominous gash had been made.

"There was a battle fought around here," whispered Hal in a bated whisper. "Can't you see, Dick, where the arrows came, evidently the Spaniards were attacked by the Indians."

"I wonder what happened?" said Dick, as he looked at the old relics, and then his eye caught a piece of paper. It was faded and slightly charred, as though an attempt had been made to burn it, and the writing was very indistinct, but Hal picked it up, and there was excitement in his eyes as he did so—for the writing was in English!

"I have been captured by the Spaniards (it ran). And now the guardians of the Incas treasure are attacking this place. With God's help I may yet find a safe harbourage after the storm; but if I do not this piece of paper, falling into some friendly hand, will tell the fact that John Lambert died during battle, as he had always wished to die. They have sought to torture me into telling where the treasure lies hidden; they have asked me for the sword with the secret hilt; but I

shall never tell. I mean to keep my word to those friendly Peruvians who are trying now to rescue me. All the tortures of the Spaniards will never make me speak. This is probably my last letter ; may it get into some English hand."

There was more writing, but it had evidently been burnt away, for the writing faded into the charred portion of the remarkable missive.

" I wonder if he ever escaped ? " said Dick, in hushed tones. Hal shook his head. " He was the prisoner of the Spaniards," he said, " and probably if they did not kill him an arrow did." Somehow in the room the boys could see the figure of that old adventurer who had set out from England on a voyage of discovery, and had been fighting for a weaker cause. They could see him standing proudly as other Englishmen had stood, unafraid in the presence of torture and threats. It was a fine picture that came into the boys' minds as the minutes chased by and the scene came stealing into the ancient room as a cinema-play flickers across the screen.

" We will keep this paper," said Dick, as he handed it to Hal. " One day, perhaps,

Mr. Creed will like to write the life of that brave sea captain, who was an Englishman to the end."

Very quietly Hal took the poor piece of faded paper, and slipped it into his coat pocket, and then they picked up the sword, and Dick raised the broken breastplate. Looking inside he saw that there was scratched there an English name, and just above that name was a gash.

He laid it upon the table as though it had been a sacred thing, and the two boys raised their caps in honour to one who had died in order to preserve his word to those who had been friendly to him.

As they came out into the sunlight again they saw that Nan and Pepita were still playing with the jaguar cubs, and that Nan had made quite good friends with the larger of the two animals.

Turning, Hal saw that in one part of the stockade there was a great opening, and the wood to either side of this breach was charred.

"Look, Dick," he said. "Our Englishman was revenged. The attackers came in there, and no doubt fought and defeated the Spaniards.

After a careful look around to see if there was anything that had escaped their notice, the two boys and the two girls left the deserted stockade, and hurried off into the trees again, led by Pepita, who apparently had other surprises in store for them.

Away in the distance Hal could see a faint spiral of smoke coming above the trees, and he drew Pepita's attention to it. Pepita laughed, but did not show any readiness to explain what it was. That was whilst they were amid the trees, but as they came out of them again, to see a sloping valley stretching between them and a high mountain, she pointed to the smoke that was stealing from the top of this mountain, and made a noise that was meant to resemble something rumbling.

"I have it," said Dick, "that is a volcano, Hal, and Pepita means to tell us that sometimes there are rumblings here."

Nan's face looked a trifle pale. "I hope it doesn't rumble now," she said, much to the boys' amusement. It was afterwards that the two learnt that really it was not a volcano now, but had once been, and that the vapour was from a hot spring that had taken the place of the lava that in past days streamed from

the summit to carry destruction to the vegetation near by.

They left the mountain to their right, and hurried along for, lost in the wonders that Pepita had shown them, they had not taken any count of time, and already the sun was sinking, a ball of red fire, in the west, and the first stars of night were beginning to peer through the fading blue of the sky.

“They will wonder what has happened to us at the camp,” said Nan. “I do hope they are not worrying.”

“We shan’t be long getting back now,” said Hal, and in dumb show he explained to Pepita that they must be getting back. She nodded, and hurried them along, down hills and through shady glades and forest paths, by little streams that tinkled musically over limestone rocks, and through tiny ravines that had been formed by the lava from the mountain. There were some wonderful waterfalls on their way, and in places little lakes that were just tiny copies of the big ones they had crossed.

What the three marvelled at was the colour of all the plants. They were so different, and the shades mixed until they came to the conclusion that there was every colour of the

rainbow sprinkled about the vegetation and trees through which they passed.

At last they left the trees behind them, and there was only just scrub. They came to a rise in the land, and now they could see the sea in the distance. Pepita pointed to the left indicating that their camp lay there, and she ran off followed by the now thoroughly tired trio. They marvelled at the way in which she could go on and on without being tired at all, for her sturdy legs flashed over the ground just in the same manner as when they had started on the journey, and she was still laughing and perfectly happy whilst Nan felt as though she could drop with fatigue at any moment.

In order to give Nan a rest Dick and Hal paused, and with two sturdy boughs from a tree they constructed a rough litter with the help of some fibre, and when Nan was seated in this the boys put the boughs on their shoulders, and carried her along that way.

Pepita was very much amused with this, and couldn't restrain her laughter, but suddenly she ceased to laugh, and pointed out to sea.

Away in the distance was a black-looking steamer, and she was steaming slowly towards

the land. It was an unusual sight for Pepita, and she showed the fact ; but why was it that Hal seemed so taken aback with surprise ? For one reason, and one alone.

The ship that was sailing towards the island of treasure was Garcia's ship, the "Black Heather" ; Garcia was on the track of the expedition, that was evident !

For a moment the whole of the little party stood spellbound at the sight of the mysterious ship, even Pepita being impressed by the surprise that had come to the others.

" We ought to hurry back to the camp," said Hal at last. " The bos'n must be warned, Dick, and we must prepare for all emergencies, as there is no knowing what Garcia will do when he finds that we have arrived on the island."

" Really, Hal," said Dick, " it would be as well if Nan and myself, or you and Nan, went back, leaving someone here just to watch the ship's movements ; for they might turn out to sea again."

" That's a good idea," said Nan, " and if you two will decide who is to come with me, Pepita can take us the shortest way back to the bos'n."

Whilst Hal and Dick chatted it over Nan

drew Pepita aside and explained to her by mimicry what they wanted, and at last she was joined by Dick, Hal having decided to remain on guard.

The two brothers shook hands, and soon the three were hurrying away, leaving Hal to find cover in some bushes, as he decided that it would be better to conceal himself from any prying eyes that might be searching the coastline of the island from the deck of the "Black Heather."

Once or twice Hal fancied that the ship was going to steer away, but he was mistaken, for suddenly she came to a stop, and he saw that the anchor was being lowered, whilst a small boat was being dropped from the davits.

They were sending a party ashore!

CHAPTER IX

THE TELL-TALE TRAIL

HAL crouched low in the undergrowth, and as he gazed down to where the boat was speeding towards the shore he could not help but feel a thrill. Now that the first surprise of Garcia's arrival was past there came the feeling that, after all, it would be better if the treasure were won after difficulties.

His thoughts turned to old John Lambert. He had asked for nothing better than the usual dangers that come with an adventurous life, and those dangers had found him unafraid.

He felt the courage of the old sea captain coming into his own heart, and set his jaw tight, waiting and watching for what was to come.

All about Hal was silence, save for the distant noise of the approaching sailors, the sound of the oars in the rowlocks.

It was a lovely scene. Colour on vegetation and beach, and away over the sea a

sunset that turned the blue water into a dozen colours, through which a little boat was hurrying towards a golden-hued beach.

At last the boat struck the sand, and the figure of a tall man sprang ashore. He was clad in a white shirt, and about his head was wound a red silk handkerchief, whilst the trousers he wore were cut off just below his knees—his feet were bare of shoes or stockings, and as he sprang ashore Hal smiled to himself.

It was Morgan—Morgan, Garcia's first mate—otherwise Michaels, who had been cook on the "Albatross," and who had disappeared in such a strange manner.

The last man to leave the boat was evidently the leader of the party. Hal could tell that, for Morgan helped him ashore, and the seamen evidently waited for his orders. Hal could see that they were talking amongst themselves and, determined to hear what their plans were, he commenced to creep through the undergrowth towards their landing-place.

The way led down by loose boulders and passages between giant pieces of limestone, whilst all about was undergrowth with here and there an occasional tiny clearing on the hill-side.

One hundred times Hal fancied he would be discovered, but he always escaped the attention of the island's unwelcome visitors, for, indeed, they were deep in conversation amongst themselves and paid little attention, as yet, to the country near them.

Once Hal, in climbing down a gap between two limestone rocks, slipped and sent a boulder crashing down the hill-side. He crouched back in the diminutive gully, his heart in his mouth, for he could hear the giant stone bounding away below.

He expected every moment to hear feet scrambling up the hill-side, but nothing came save a sea-bird wheeling in from over the sunset which splashed the waters, with a cry that almost made Hal laugh, it sounded so human.

When he looked out he discovered that the party below had shown little or no concern about the noise above, putting it down to some frightened animal on the hill-side, no doubt.

Hal commenced his climb downwards again and this time with greater care, pausing after each step, and never going on a direct route, but always stealing either to the right or left in what cover there was for him.

By now he had come very near to Garcia's party, and Hal could see that the man who had stepped ashore last was Garcia, for, wonder of wonders, he was wearing old John Lambert's sword.

It was suspended about his waist by a leather strap, and evidently Garcia prized it greatly by the manner in which he held it, resting his hand on the hilt when he was talking and looking down at it. Hal laughed softly below his breath. Garcia looked just like a pirate with that rakish-looking rapier strapped to his side, and standing near Morgan, who would have made the ideal type of buccaneer with the help of some revolvers through his belt. Little did Hal realize then that, if not pirates, Garcia and his men were very like them—but, there, Hal was to learn.

Hal was lying now screened by the dried grass that, wasted and yellow, grew amidst the sand at the top of the ridges overhead.

He was quite concealed by the grasses and, what was so very important to the future schemes of the expedition, he could hear everything that was being said. At that moment Garcia was the speaker and, as Hal could hear, his tones were angry.

“I tell you, Morgan, that you are wrong,”

Garcia was saying. "This cannot be the island, and whilst we are wasting words here the 'Albatross' people are laughing at us, and handling the treasure we came out for."

Morgan laughed. "This is the only uncharted island hereabouts," he said. "And if this isn't the place where the treasure was concealed we had better give up the search. I'm sick of dodging here, there, and everywhere. Why not make a search here first anyway? We've come for water, so let us go inland to get it."

"And waste valuable time," put in Garcia. "Really, Morgan, you don't understand that we are not the only explorers in the field and, what is more, we haven't the map. We can thank you for the loss of that."

Hal could see Morgan flush below his tan, and he laughed at the thought of how Morgan had been fooled by Mr. Creed.

"If you had troubled to do what was expected of you, Morgan, the treasure might have been ours by now." There came a murmur from the men standing about.

"So you are all against me, are you?" cried Morgan. "I tell you, Garcia, that this *is* the island. You can believe it or not, as you like." He fell to pacing the sand, and

then slowly the blood left Hal's face, for, looking higher up the sands, towards the direction which Morgan was taking, Hal could see footprints.

His footprints, and Dick's, and Nan's—and Morgan had seen them, too, for he ran forward, and falling on his knees, examined these marks in the sands.

"Hi! Garcia, Garcia!" he cried. Hal saw Garcia hurry towards his first mate. "Look, man," cried Morgan. "Their footsteps—the young Irvings' footsteps, and the girl. I know those boots, Garcia." He chuckled. "I've cleaned them."

"That means?" said Garcia.

"The 'Albatross' has arrived," put in Morgan, triumphantly, "and Creed and his crowd are on the island."

Suddenly out upon the air sounded the boom of a gun.

Hal knew it for the warning given from the yacht.

Dick had evidently arrived with the news!

Garcia looked at Morgan, and Morgan looked at Garcia, but neither spoke; they only smiled as if that gun, and the footprints in the sands had, for a moment, healed the breach between them.

Hal watched them hurry back to the boat. He saw Garcia unhitch his sword, and prop it against a tree ; and then he heard the instructions of the "Black Heather's" captain to the three men who were left behind to guard the few things that were now being lifted out of the boat.

"We'll camp here temporarily," he said. "I'll go back to make the arrangements." He sprang into the boat, and she was pulled away, whilst the three men who had been left behind stood together chatting over their chances of getting some of the treasure.

After a time they grew tired of this, and one, bringing out a pack of much-bethumbed cards, suggested a game ; the others fell in, and using an upturned keg for a table the three began to play. Hal's eyes were fascinated by the sword, and now that his presence could make no difference to the prospect of Garcia leaving the island, he determined to get back the weapon that had been left him by his father.

It lay against two water-kegs nearer to Hal than were the three players, and it took him only a moment to decide in what manner he would get it. A faint sea mist was rising now, and it was getting dark quickly—two

facts that Hal knew to be to his advantage.

He meant to crawl towards the sword and, if possible, take it quite unobserved. As he crept forward an unexpected agent came to his help. They were beginning to quarrel amongst themselves as to whose turn it was to play, and Hal, taking advantage of the noisy words, sprang from his place of concealment and, laying his hand on the sword had picked it up, and was racing back to the sand-hills like the wind.

With a cry the three men sprang to their feet, their quarrel forgotten, and followed; but Hal was well ahead, and benefiting by the way he had come he returned the self-same way, taking great care to displace as many large stones as he could, and these rolled down in dangerous proximity to Garcia's men. One stone, a large round piece of limestone, sent one of Hal's pursuers almost hurtling into the sea, and when he at last realized where he was, he found himself sitting near the breakers with his hand on the stone that had sent him back so rapidly. "Well, I never!" was all he could say. "Well, I never!"

He didn't follow, after that, but left it to

his friends, and they, poor fellows, were in by no means a happy position, for they were chasing a boy who was armed, and stones were rattling about them in quite a terrifying manner.

At last, however, the chase continued away from the rocks, more on the level ; and Hal, turning, found to his dismay that his pursuers were gaining on him. Once or twice he was for turning, but he decided that in this half-light and against two it would be a risky thing to do, so he ran on, turning his steps towards where he fancied the old stockade to be.

Tired with all the adventures of the day, Hal ran on in a mechanical way. His legs seemed like lead beneath him, and he heaved a sigh of genuine delight when through the half-darkness rose the baulks of the stockade.

He found the rotten door, and running into the stockade's compound he flung the door back. He could hear the two men run panting to the opening, but they did not come in. They were evidently deliberating about something.

It was that moment that saved Hal, for he thought suddenly of the jaguar cubs. He hurried to the hut where Pepita had left them

and, coaxing them out into the compound, led them to the gate.

Then Hal stepped into the shadow as the gate opened, and the men stepped into the stockade clearing.

They were only there for a minute. Before them glared the four angry eyes of the jaguars. It was enough. With cries of fear they turned and fled, through the aisles of trees and down the hill-side to the sea, as though ten thousand furies were on their track.

Hal laughed until his sides simply ached, and then, grasping his sword firmly he hurried out of the stockade, and made his way as best he could through the darkness in the direction of the camp.

The first hint that Hal had that he was near the camp was the sight of lights flickering amid the undergrowth. He had fancied at first that they were borne by some of Garcia's sailors; that was until from behind a ship's lantern appeared a figure—it was the bos'n.

"Glory be!" he cried. "But if it isn't you after all, Hal. We had given you up, and were just about to set out in search of you."

"I stayed to hear their plans," said Hal, "and to get this."

He brought the sword into the light of the

lantern, and looked keenly at the bos'n to mark his astonishment. Surprise showed very clearly on Bill's face, and a gnarled hand came down on Hal's shoulder.

"So you've been right under the enemies' guns, and have brought back your father's sword. Well, well, but this is a story for Mr. Creed, and he'll be waiting at the hut with Nan and Dick, so let us be getting back."

Raising his lantern the bos'n waved it to and fro as a signal to the others that the search was at an end, and together the two hurried back to where a worried Mr. Creed was awaiting news of the search party's success.

When he saw Hal he could scarcely restrain his delight, and then and there Hal told his guardian how he had waited and watched, and had seen Morgan discover the footprints. He made only a small story of the recovery of the sword, giving the greater part of the credit to Pepita's pets.

He saw with surprise that Pepita, seeming thoroughly at home and dressed now in some clothing of Nan's, was in the room. And another thing that made Hal wonder was the atmosphere of imbued excitement that was obvious everywhere.

It fell to Dick to explain this.

"Hal," he said, "guardian knows Spanish, and Pepita is Spanish. She was on a ship that was wrecked here. Pepita and an old sailor were saved; he looked after Pepita until he died of old age, and since then, until our arrival, she was alone—and, I say, Hal, she knows where the treasure is, and as Garcia has arrived the treasure party starts to-night."

All this had been told by Dick in a semi-breathless whisper, and it was Mr. Creed himself who confirmed it, and told Hal in addition that the two brothers would naturally accompany the expedition.

"I took it for granted that Garcia would stay when Dick came in with the news of the 'Black Heather's' arrival," he said. "And then I discovered that Pepita here was Spanish and, despite being so young when cast on the island had not forgotten the language. I spoke to her, Hal, and we soon made friends, and then I asked about the treasure, for Nan had told me of the gold ingot she found in Pepita's tree-house. Judge of my surprise when Pepita herself volunteered to guide our party to such wealth, Hal, as would make the fortunes of many seem small by

comparison. We are going almost immediately, in order to steal a march on Garcia."

Tired as Hal undoubtedly was, the thought of the final search for the treasure of the Incas soon drove any fatigue that he had felt away.

He was all anxiety to be off, as indeed were the rest of the party, and when at last Mr. Creed assembled the lucky ones who were to form the treasure expedition Hal's excitement knew no bounds.

On the yacht the one gun—a six-pounder of old pattern—had to be run out to serve as a protection to the camp, and the "Albatross" had been brought nearer to the shore. In addition to this, those who remained in the camp had been advised to keep careful "guards," and had been served out with rifles, sporting guns, and ammunition to fit both. The yacht's captain was in command, and Mr. Creed had given him instructions to hold no intercourse whatsoever, even by word or by signals, with Garcia or his men.

When everything was ready, when all the provisions had been packed—food and water for a day and a half—the little body of treasure hunters moved from the camp to the good wishes of those who remained behind.

After a considerable amount of discussion

Nan had been permitted to join the party, and with her came Peter—a madly excited Peter who barked his appreciation of the honour that was being shown him.

“Look here, Peter,” said Hal, “if you go on like that we shall have Garcia down on us in a moment.” Peter cocked an ear and winked at the light, and after Hal’s reproof he was as silent as the night into which the party hurried, all filled with one thought—the treasure of the Incas.

It was a very difficult thing for the party to make rapid progress, being night and quite unexplored country through which they were passing, but Pepita apparently knew every rill and rock, hill-side, and tiny wood on the way, and she led them in such a wonderful way that Mr. Creed was amazed at her knowledge of the place.

At two in the morning, after a march of three hours, Mr. Creed called a halt for two hours’ rest and a meal, a decision which the party—especially Nan and the boys—hailed with joy, and Hal had no sooner had some food than he dropped off to sleep.

Not so Pepita. In some mysterious way she disappeared, and as soon as her presence was missed Bill and Dick went out to find her.

It was by a tiny lake screened amidst trees that they came upon their guide.

On a stone that jutted into the dark-looking waters Pepita was lying, and in her hand was a spear. At times the surprised two saw this fall, and then come out of the water with some glowing object attached to it.

"The treasure," said Dick. But old Bill laughed, for Pepita had risen from her place on the stone and was coming towards them, carrying a number of neatly speared fish. Dick could see them in the light of the lantern. It was to Mr. Creed that Pepita explained how this particular fresh-water fish at some times in the year glowed, and made spearing by night a simple matter.

"Dick thought it was the treasure," said the bos'n when Mr. Creed had explained.

Before the party set off again they were able to have a lovely fish breakfast, and their gratitude to the island-girl knew no bounds. She was a favourite with all the party now, and the early morning shadows were made amusing by Pepita who, when opportunity afforded, would dance in front of the treasure seekers in the quaintest manner imaginable.

She was so much a child of this wonderful,

this silent, place about them ; and the way in which she imitated the calls of the birds when morning began to dawn made every one marvel.

The first part of the journey from the camp up to the halting place had been made along an uphill path, through tangled creepers and the dark shadows of woods, up rocky ravines, such a feature of the island, and over rocks that impeded the way. Now, with the dawn breaking to the music of countless birds, the scenery was very different. The party had come to a broad green plateau from which could be seen the extinct volcano and the sea in the distance.

Below, the tree-girt hill-side stretched away to the sea-edge almost, whilst before them was a broad plain, almost as green as the English countryside, with just a few clumps of trees here and there to give rest to the eye.

In the distance, standing out against the sky in one long crimson streak that seemed to mix with the sunrise, was a ridge of red hills—or, rather, little mountains—and it was towards these that Pepita led the party.

She was laughing with delight as they hurried along and, when but a mile or so from the foot of the hills, she ran ahead as though

to encourage them on. As fast as they could go they followed, and when the bos'n, Hal, and Dick reached Pepita, she was pausing by an opening, a valley between two of these giant hills, and it was evident that their journey's end lay somewhere in that valley, for Pepita was pointing and laughing—pointing down this opening between the hills, a valley of bright red stones. As the bos'n said—“*What a place for a treasure!*”

CHAPTER X

THE CAVE OF THE TWINKLING LIGHTS

THE whole party burst into a shout of cheering when they realized that at last, under Pepita's guidance, they had come to the very last lap of their journey in search of the treasure.

"Soon," said Mr. Creed, "we shall know if our mission is to be successful or not, eh, Hal?"

He turned to Hal, who, with flushed face, was hurrying forward towards where Pepita was beckoning the party on.

Hal smiled. "It seems too good to be true," he said. "But perhaps after all, guardian, there is no treasure."

"Anyhow," put in Dick, "we have had a splendid trip, and any amount of adventures, haven't we, Nan?"

"Rather!" said Nan. "It has been a most wonderful time. The happiest time I have ever spent in my life."

But the party soon stopped talking amongst themselves, for they were all so keen to get to the end of their journey, to the place that Pepita, in conversation with Mr. Creed, had spoken of.

At last the plain was crossed, and they entered a narrow defile. Here the light was gloomy, and the party were struck with the strange plants that seemed to be growing out of the solid rock.

"I should want more nourishment than that to live on," said the bos'n. "Shiver me, but they seem to be living on the brink of a precipice, don't they, boys?"

These plants were indeed very curious, and Mr. Creed stopped to examine them, for he was interested in flowers and shrubs and things like that, and in Cornwall he was known as a very clever expert upon this subject.

It must be confessed that the boys took but little stock of the strange flowers and rock-growths, for they were all anxiety to get to where the treasure—the great treasure of the Incas—lay.

Nan felt convinced that it consisted of bag upon bag of sovereigns, and Hal and Dick had great difficulty in explaining to her that it would be impossible for money to be here

unless it was the ancient coinage of the Peruvians at the time when they had come to the island.

As they proceeded down the defile the party could not help feeling a little awed at the nature of the place through which they were going.

Sheer, on either side of them, rose the rocks, and only a faint strip of sky could be seen above them.

What added to the strangeness of everything was the curious atmosphere, the dampness of the ravine—that and the little streams that trickled out of the rocks and in parts formed tiny pools that, if it hadn't have been for the pocket lights of the boys, would have caused considerable inconvenience to the party in general.

As they went along they came to several caves that the boys fancied might be the hiding-places of the treasure, and many hearty laughs were caused by Hal venturing into some of these only to be called out again by Pepita.

She laughed and said something in Spanish that Mr. Creed translated as meaning "No good. No good."

The journey seemed endless, but Pepita

still forged ahead, cautioning against rock pools, and explaining in dumb show the difficulties in the path before the party came up to them.

At last Mr. Creed gave a sigh of relief, for in the distance he could see that the ravine opened out, and soon the boys and the bos'n rejoiced to see a large circular place in the defile.

This was a kind of vast well, and here Mr. Creed called a halt, and for a moment or so the party rested.

But Pepita would have none of that, she seemed determined that the end of the journey must be made speedily, and she hurried them off again, and on into the blackness of the valley.

But they hadn't to go far, for suddenly she stopped before a dark opening in the rock, and her eyes were alight with excitement, and she was speaking quickly.

Hal ran forward and was soon lost in the darkness of the cave, for such it was, and the bos'n and the others quickly followed.

Pepita, keen on being leader to the last, hurried past them, however, and came up with Hal—a Hal who had paused, for something in the distance had fascinated him.

"Look, bos'n!" he cried back to the old sailor. "There must be animals of some sort here—look at their eyes."

Bos'n Bill hurried to Hal, and was himself struck with amazement at the sight he saw. A myriad twinkling eyes that seemed so strange in the darkness of that place.

But Pepita was laughing softly to herself, and they could hear her singing and the rustle of her dress as she danced for very joy—then it was that Dick turned his light into the cave and the whole party looked in amazement at what lay before them.

Piled high, the one upon the other, were plates and vessels of all description. They shone and shone again as the light found them.

Bracelets of cunning workmanship were scattered about and from the open mouth of a vast bag a thousand tiny lights twinkled to give light to the cave.

"Jewels," said Hal in amazement. And they were jewels, such jewels as none of them had ever seen before.

Dick ran to the bag and put both his hands into its mouth and poured out a heap of amethysts, diamonds, rubies, and other stones.

Gold ingots also were here, and curious

candlesticks made of solid silver and solid gold. There were rings of a strange pattern, and delicate necklaces that shone with radiance in the dim light.

Brooches and shields, set with stones, lay upon the floor, and swords in numbers, jewelled and delicately fashioned, were strewn about. It was more than treasure, it was a world's ransom, and it so impressed Mr. Creed that he laid his hand on Hal's shoulder.

"Here, Hal," he said, "is enough wealth to turn the brain of the most avaricious man, but it must not change you."

Hal laughed.

"Guardian," he said, "with such wealth as this what could one not do? Think of those who are in want and those who need help in their work one can benefit from such a treasure."

The bos'n looked with admiring eyes at the elder Irving. Well did he know that things of this sort would not ruin Hal, and at the very moment of Hal's speaking he had thought himself of what could be done with such a vast treasure.

As for Nan, she had run to some of the more lovely objects and was putting them about her neck and dancing with glee, much to

Pepita's amusement—little Pepita, who had only taken from the treasure a solid gold ingot of whose value she knew nothing.

Dick was examining some of the swords, and soon the whole party was busily going over the treasure, and Mr. Creed instructed the sailors who had come with the party to fill the sacks that they had brought with them.

It was a big job, but at last the jewels and the ingots were safely stored away, and all that remained of the treasure were things too heavy for the party to bear with them back to the boat.

Indeed, it was doubtful that they could ever be taken away, for already what they had was enough—more than enough—to make the kingdom that possessed such riches a power in finance.

"And this was what I fancied to be animals," said Hal laughingly, as the party moved from "The Cave of the Twinkling Lights," as the bos'n had christened it.

They camped in the great well of the ravine, and when Mr. Creed had set a watch, the rest of the treasure seekers arranged themselves as comfortably as they could in order to get some sleep.

The dreams of all of them that night were

filled with visions of such jewels as were unrivalled in the treasure of any king or emperor in the world.

When the party awoke the sun was high in the sky, and gloomy as it was in the ravine, its rays could be seen shining into the defile.

Hastily the tents were folded, and when all traces of the encampment had been obliterated they set off again, coming at last to the edge of the plain.

They crossed it without any event of importance happening, and as they hurried along, Mr. Creed marvelled at the way in which they had travelled through the night, for the path by which Pepita had led them was a dangerous one indeed.

By daylight it was possible to see the difficulties of the way. Little paths overhanging great streams and ways through swampy land that, but for her confidence in herself, would have probably been fatal to some, at any rate, of the party.

Mr. Creed called Pepita in Spanish, and when she came to him he chatted—thanking her as Hal and Dick thought, and they were not wrong, for Pepita smiled all over her face and looked more pleased than she had ever done.

Mr. Creed was smiling, for there was some-

thing about this little child of the wastes that amused him immensely, for she was so naïve and so hardy, and all the time such a child.

“Pepita will come to England with us?” he asked her, and translated what he had said to the boys.

Hal and Dick waited eagerly for Mr. Creed to tell them her reply.

“Wouldn’t it be fun for all of us if she came?” said Hal to Dick, and Dick agreed, for he was one of Pepita’s warmest admirers.

“Boys,” said Mr. Creed at last, “Pepita says that after these last few days nothing would make her leave our party. She says that she wants to be one of the family. What do you say?”

For answer Hal and Dick and Nan ran to Pepita and lifted her on their shoulders, and she was borne forward in triumph, whilst the boys cheered, and at the first stream they came to Hal insisted on a mock ceremony being performed, at which Pepita was made one of the family.

The joke was that she took it in all seriousness, and when Mr. Creed and the bos’n and Hal and Dick bowed in front of her, she accepted their homage in the gravest manner possible.

Thus was Pepita made one of the Irving family according—so Hal said—to the ancient rites of the Isle of Treasure.

It was wonderful how different Pepita became after this. She seemed prouder, and looked at the carriers as though she commanded them. Her ways were a fund of amusement to all of the others, and her attempts to speak English were just as funny.

Mr. Creed explained that he would teach her that on the yacht, and Pepita's thanks showed in her eyes.

They were well on their way back now, and had come almost in view of the camp when from the distance the bos'n distinguished the sound of hurrying feet.

"We had better halt," he said to Mr. Creed, and there and then he gave the order. The party came to a standstill wondering what was coming to them through the trees. The next moment they knew.

The foliage was parted, and the exhausted-looking figure of Bolters came to view.

He had evidently been coming at a great pace, for he was out of breath, and water had to be given to him before he could explain his dramatic appearance.

"The camp," he said, at last. "Garcia

is on his way. He sent a man, but we gave no answer, and then a gun was fired. They sent me off at once to warn you."

Immediately the order to resume a quick march was given, and the party hurried, or rather raced, for the camp.

"We were only just in time," said Hal. "Another day and Garcia would have prevented us from getting the treasure. We owe everything to Pepita."

At last the camp came in sight, and it was to the cheering of its occupants that the treasure seekers came to where the captain of the "Albatross" was searching the adjacent scrub with his keen telescope.

He and Mr. Creed hurried off to the hut that had been built, and there the position was explained.

Hal and Dick were very excited with the news, and both of them took the happening very coolly. As a matter of fact they regarded it in the light of an adventure more than anything else, and they both speculated on what part they would play.

"Of course, we shall have to help defend the place if it is attacked," said Hal; and Dick's eyes shone at the thought.

"Will they give us guns?" he said.

"I should just think so," put in Nan.
"And perhaps they will give me one, too."

Hal and Dick did not say anything, but they thought a lot more of Nan after that. She meant to play her part evidently.

When Mr. Creed and the captain came from the hut they both looked a little worried, and immediately conferred with the bos'n.

It was in old Bill's hands that they entrusted the command of the men, and in a minute he was off organizing the scanty force at his command.

He sent sailors, armed sailors, to all the points that overlooked the camp, and when this was done the others were sent off to rest so that when the time came they could relieve their comrades.

Every one of the party had entered into the spirit of the danger, and Pepita, when told, begged Mr. Creed, as she knew every nook and cranny of the island, to allow her to steal off and to see what Garcia's party were about to do.

Mr. Creed thought for a moment, and then, realizing how capable Pepita was of taking care of herself, he let her go with the strict instruction to take all the care she could of herself, and not to go too far from the camp.

Hal and Dick watched her go with envy, but they forgot the next minute for the bos'n was giving them their instructions. Dick was interested in telegraphy, and so was Hal, and it fell to the duty of these two to keep in signal communication with the yacht.

And so the day passed with active preparation, and when the shades of darkness came it brought no sign of the enemy, only Pepita —a Pepita who ran like a hare past the camp sentries and came to where Mr. Creed was waiting.

"The camp," she said in Spanish. "There are stranger men on all sides."

Mr. Creed looked up into the bos'n's face.

"Bos'n," he said, quietly, "we're besieged."

The astounding news that was communicated to Mr. Creed made both he and the bos'n determined in their minds, that by some means Garcia had received knowledge of the fact that the treasure had reached the camp.

"We must prevent the camp being rushed at all costs," said the bos'n, and he immediately called Hal and bade the elder Irving signal the news to the "Albatross."

Hal and Dick carried out the command, and then it was that Dick, who had received

lessons in signalling, determined on a bold idea.

"Look here, Hal," he said, "as far as I can see we are in great danger, although the bos'n doesn't admit it. I am going to leave the camp but you mustn't tell anyone."

Before Hal could advise Dick not to go the lad had left the little camp, and, ducking low, had run across the space that separated it from the foliage just above the beach.

He ran so fast that it would have been indeed difficult for any of Garcia's men to have seen him, and soon he was lost to view in the scrub.

Hal was so surprised by Dick's sudden action that he did not know what steps to take. But, remembering what his duty was, he remained at the signal point, in order to keep up communication with the "Albatross."

As for Dick, once in the foliage he crawled like a snake down towards the beach. There was a boat drawn up on the sands, and it was not one of the boats of the "Albatross," but evidently belonged to Garcia, for one of his men was lolling sleepily by it.

So Garcia's men had got down as far as this, thought Dick. He determined by a desperate ruse to get to the boat. Crawling

round behind the tired figure, he lay flat, and crept forward in that manner until he had come almost within touching distance of the sailor.

It was just as the shout of warning and a shot came from the scrub that Dick leapt to his feet, and, dashing full at the man, swept him aside. Whilst the fellow was getting to his feet, the boy had pushed the light craft out, and, springing into it, was rowing away with his head bent down, for shots were now coming from different parts of the under-growth.

Dick rowed as he had never rowed before, every moment expecting a bullet to strike the boat; but none did so, and at last he reached the side of the "Albatross," and clambered aboard.

It was just as Dick had thought. There were only a scanty few of the crew on deck, and his amazement knew no bounds when, on entering the chart-room, which was also the signalling station of the ship, he discovered that the wireless operator was on shore.

Dick's absence from the camp passed unnoticed, but there was another fact that did not. It was Bolters who came in from an advanced post to tell Mr. Creed that Garcia's

men were gradually encroaching on the camp's defences.

Mr. Creed looked anxious.

"It means, bos'n," said Mr. Creed to the old salt, "that soon it will lead to shots, and in very honesty I must confess that I would sooner sacrifice the whole of the treasure to Garcia than have a single life on my shoulders."

"Yes," said the bos'n, "and there are other considerations. We must remember Nan and Pepita; and yet somehow to me it seems the coward's way to hand over to this villain something that we have rightly won—Hal's legacy."

He thought for a moment, and then brought his big fist down on the rough table that had been constructed.

"No! By the soul of Nelson, it shall not lightly be given up," he said, "and I know really, Creed, that in your heart of hearts you think the same."

The old guardian rose to his feet. "You're right, bos'n," he said. "I was only thinking of the others. Let it be fight on!"

And fight on it was in a new fashion. All through the night Garcia's men made attempts to enter the camp, but not by means of

shot, rather by the tactics common to the thief.

It was obvious that Garcia also wanted to avoid a real fight, and when morning dawned the only casualty was Morgan, whose black eye denoted the excellent aim that Bolters had made with a clod of loose earth.

Another day passed and another night, both filled with ominous suggestions of warfare; but nothing transpired. Only the provisions began to run low, and a little party that tried to get down to the beach in order to row out to the yacht were beaten back.

In a hut that served as the camp's headquarters the bos'n and Mr. Creed were deep in conversation.

"It occurred last night," said the old sailor. "One portion of the guard was caught napping, and to-day all the meat rations are gone and five kegs of water."

"They evidently mean to starve us out," said Mr. Creed. "That's bad news to bring, bos'n."

The bos'n looked up. "There's worse to follow," he said. "They must have made a captive—Dick's missing."

Mr. Creed sprang to his feet. "Garcia means to keep him for a hostage, does he ?

Things will have to change, bos'n, for if I hear that a hair of Dick's head is harmed, I'll make Garcia answer for it."

They sent for Hal, and when he came questioned him; but Hal, true to his word, said nothing. Little did he know that his brother, away on the "Albatross," was sounding the waves of the air, as only he and the wireless man ashore knew how.

The ticking of the instrument combined with the flashes on the aerials that graced the yacht. But Dick's hopes were sinking, for no answer came to his repeated callings—no, not even when he sounded the S.O.S.

The man on the look-out told him of Hal's signals, how the food was running short, and of the party's fears. Those were restless hours for Dick, but he stuck to his work, and it was at midnight, two days after the besieging of the camp, that to one of his messages came a faint reply.

Dick had spoken to a passing ship, and she was a British cruiser bound for Rio.

"Changing our course," came the message through to the younger Irving, and the next moment he got up from his chair and hurried on deck to tell the news.

There are dangers by land and sea that do

not make one afraid, but the dangers of fighting were well known to the bos'n, and it was not for this reason that on the third day of the siege his face looked more worried than ever before.

"We can't hold out much longer, Mr. Creed," he said to the head of the expedition. "This morning the last water ration was served out, and unless a miracle happens we shall have to start negotiating with Garcia.

"Much as I hate that," he went on, "I see that that will be the only thing to do; for we cannot have the girls and Hal suffering. And then there is Dick; unless we do something soon Garcia may get desperate."

The bos'n's fears were not false ones, for as the day wore on and there was no water, the crew began to murmur amongst themselves.

Some of them were for going over to Garcia, and others for making a rush through his beleaguering lines; but the bos'n kept them well in hand.

"It is not like British seamen to talk like this," he said. "I've seen men suffer worse things than thirst at sea, my lads; and we are not going to give in so easily to Garcia."

Poor Nan and Pepita were suffering, too, although they bravely said they were not.

Pepita smiled, and sought to show her teeth as of old, but the smile was only a faint one, and Nan's laughter was forced.

The bos'n pointed out their bravery to the men, and it had a wonderful effect. Bolters spoke to the crew.

"There's not a man here," he said, "who is skunk enough to leave little 'uns like that in the lurch, and if there is, let him stand out now and answer for it to Jack Bolters, for that's me name."

"It's all right, Bolters," said Curly Andrews, one of his chums. "We are not going to show the white feather, don't you fret. We mean to go right through with it until the chief tells us that the game is up."

And after that orders were orders, and they were obeyed.

There was not a murmur, and if Garcia fancied that the party was easily going to humble itself before him he made the greatest mistake in his life.

Pepita, by the cunning known only to herself, managed one night to steal past Garcia's guards, and in the early morning she came back with two little kegs of water, and it was this that prolonged the siege and gave the party new heart.

But Pepita tried again and failed, and the day came when many of the crew were exhausted by thirst.

Mr. Creed called a council of war, and put it to the men.

"What course shall we take?" he said. "Shall we offer Garcia part of the treasure, or try and fight our way down to the boats with it?"

There was not a man who did not advocate fighting the way through; but it was never necessary, for that night, when all the arrangements had been made for the sortie, a strange thing happened.

Suddenly the camp was lit up in the rays of a vast glare. It looked as though the whole camp side of the island were under a vivid moonlight.

"Look, bos'n!" cried Mr. Creed, rushing to the door of the hut, and he pointed out to sea.

Nosing her way into the little bay was a ship, and from her bow there came a broad gleam of light.

"A searchlight!" cried the bos'n. "It's a battleship, Creed—a battleship! We're saved!"

From all parts of the camp now came sounds

of cheering, and there was borne to the ears of the expedition the sound of cries in the undergrowth—cries of fright as Garcia's men scuttled away, seeking to escape from the glare of that terrible light.

“ It's a miracle—that's what it is ! ” cried Mr. Creed, as he looked out to where the ship was slowly creaming her way along, and he could see the ugly little guns that poked out of her sides and the two monsters in the fore-part of the ship.

“ She's British, or I am a Chinaman ! ” said the bos'n. “ Why, I would know one of our cruisers in any sea of the world. She's a cruiser—a jolly old British cruiser—and bless her ! she has come to help some Britons out of danger, as our ships have done many a time before.”

He started to dance and sing, and ordered that the last few drops of water should be divided amongst the crew, and that for this work and for their bravery they should be compensated as amply as any seamen who had had prize money in the world before.

The mystery of the ship was so great that Mr. Creed could not conceal how puzzled he was, and he was all anxiety to get aboard the

rescuer to hear the story of why they had come to the island.

The way to the beach was free now, and accompanied by the bos'n and one sailor, and leaving the others to guard the girls and the treasure, Mr. Creed set out and came unhindered to the beach, and found there a boat.

Soon they were rowing out to the timely arrived craft, and Mr. Creed was being welcomed aboard by the captain.

"Just in time apparently," he said, as he shook Mr. Creed's hand. "If it hadn't been for your wireless man on the 'Albatross' we should never have come here."

"My wireless man!" said Mr. Creed. "But he was beleaguered with us on the island. I don't understand it at all."

It was a pretty enough mystery, and it interested the captain of the "Benfleet" so much that he ordered a pinnace away, and with Mr. Creed steamed towards the "Albatross," lying now under the rays of the search-light.

They clambered aboard and came to the chart-room, there to see a sight that made Mr. Creed more amazed than ever, for, sitting at the wireless installation testing the

machinery, was Dick, his face wreathed in smiles.

“I must explain,” he said. “I crawled past the guard, Mr. Creed, and came aboard, as I fancied I might bring aid with the wireless.”

Mr. Creed’s hand fell on Dick’s shoulder.

“You are a worthy Irving,” he said. “And let me tell you, Dick, you have saved us and your brother’s fortune; for had this ship been a day late, or had it not come at all, we should have had to give Garcia the treasure.”

They bore Dick back to the camp, and there the captain of the warship cruising in South American waters insisted on providing the lunch.

It came from the “Benfleet,” and it was the finest meal Pepita or Nan or the boys had ever had, and when they had toasted the King they drank to Dick’s health and to Hal’s treasure, and amid rousing cheers the evening went on.

When the soft dawn of a new day rose over the island, now a place of peace, it was to discover unusual activity in the tiny lagoon where the “Black Heather” had come to anchor.

Garcia's now thoroughly frightened crew had got all their stores aboard, and as fast as they could get the donkey-engine to work the anchor was being lifted.

When at last it was stowed away the lowering-looking craft lifted out on an ebb tide—stealing towards the open sea like the thief she was. Garcia's men looked thoroughly cowed as the “Benfleet” fired a gun by way of a passing reminder that piracy was dead on the high seas, and the sinister ship melted away into the sunrise as secretly as she had come, and as silently.

Thus Garcia passed from the island story, and those who had stood the siege and the danger to the last, loaded their trim little yacht with the treasure they had found, and when night began to lay her hand over the tropic vegetation of the lovely spot, they bade their farewells to a place that had given them such adventure.

Now the treasure tale is told—the adventures are over, and the old “Albatross” is lazing her last days away in a little Cornish seaport. But she still keeps her memories, and on the anniversary of the rescue of the

expedition Sir Hal Irving and Dick, his brother, who is now an eminent scientist, entertain the old bos'n—still hale despite his years—and Mr. Creed.

Nan and Pepita, now grown-up ladies, are always at the festival—a festival that is dedicated to the days when the party went out to search for treasure and found it on a wild island in a tropic sea, thus bringing wealth and happiness to an old Cornish home.

Above their heads, as they sit talking of the dear days, is an ancient Spanish sword—the sword of John Lambert, the weapon that led them to the resting-place of an old sea-adventurer who had been game to the last.

